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Berklee student, 22, who learned to play music by watching online videos, is youngest TED senior fellow ever

Posted by Matt Rocheleau December 12, 2013 02:42 PM

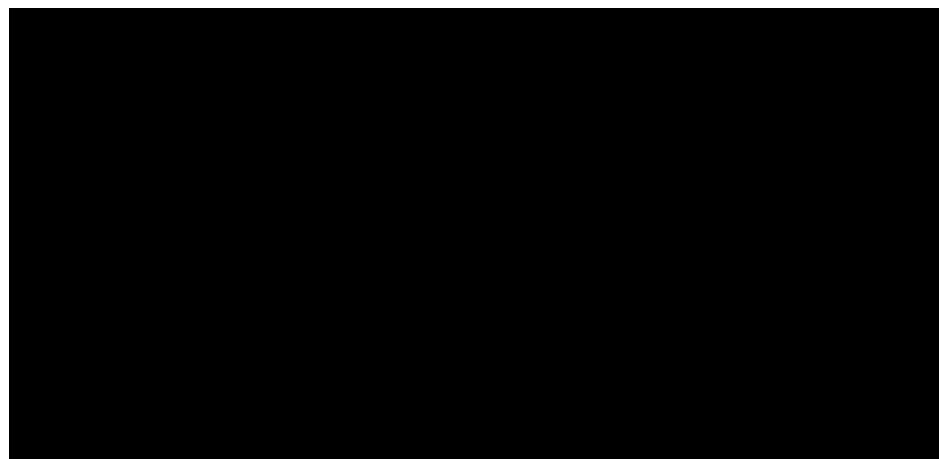
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(Usman Riaz / Vimeo)

The above video by Usman Riaz describes more about his talents and how he learned them.

By Matt Rocheleau, Boston.com Staff

A 22-year-old Berklee College of Music freshman from Pakistan who used the Internet to teach himself to play instruments, compose music and make films is the youngest TED senior fellow ever selected, according to campus officials.

Usman Riaz was one of a dozen senior fellows recently named by TED, the well-known nonprofit that runs conferences about the latest ideas in technology, entertainment, design and other fields.

Riaz will present at the next four TED conferences starting in 2014, school officials said.

Born in Karachi, Pakistan, he was classically trained on the piano at age 6. But, Riaz' curiosity in media grew as he aged.

With few music teachers to turn to in his native country, he watched hundreds of online videos to teach himself to play percussive guitar, harmonica, mandolin, harmonium, and percussion, according to officials at Berklee.

Riaz published some of his self-taught talent online. In 2011, a YouTube video of his song "Fire Fly" went viral.

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Among the hundreds of thousands of viewers was TED curator Chris Anderson.

The following year, Riaz performed at TEDGlobal 2012 in Edinburgh, Scotland. Beside him on stage was one of his heroes, percussive guitar master [Preston Reed](#) whom Riaz had watched online videos of to learn the instrument.

“Riaz has performed on the TED main stage and travelled all over the world sharing his artwork and music with audiences to emphasize how all of us can use multimedia to further our talents,” Berklee said in a statement.

A first-semester student studying for a dual major in composition and performance, Riaz also writes and directs [short films](#) and painted the cover of his album [Circus in the Sky](#), officials said.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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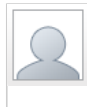
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Wow. Good for him!

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