

PIANIST MAY BE DEPORTED

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Body

Pianist Donald Vega has entertained Quincy Jones and Lionel Hampton and is seen as a jazz world wunderkind. Immigration officials say he's an illegal immigrant from Nicaragua and should go.

The 22-year-old University of Southern California junior, who was born in Nicaragua and entered the United States illegally in 1989, may get an Immigration and Naturalization Service **deportation** notice next month.

It's a prospect that has sent shock waves through the Los Angeles jazz community. Vega is considered one of the best young jazz **pianists** in the country if not the world.

"Donald is first-class. You hardly run across someone that talented at that age. It would be devastating to send him home," said bass player and arranger John Clayton, who has worked with Whitney Houston and Natalie Cole.

Vega was 8 years old when he started playing the piano in Masaya, Nicaragua. His parents refused to submit to the philosophies of the Sandinista regime, however, and their lives were in danger, Clayton said.

His mother fled to the United States and soon sent for Donald, who has been living illegally in the country ever since.

Vega realized last year that he could qualify for permanent residency by requesting a suspension of **deportation**. He surrendered to the INS, declared his undocumented status and held out the hope that because he had lived in the United States for seven years, he would be granted residency.

But the new immigration law signed by President Clinton last September lengthens to 10 years the required time a person must live in this country to be eligible for a suspension of **deportation**. The law takes effect April 1.

If Vega's case isn't processed by then, he could be **deported**.

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