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Manitoulin – Holly Scott, who arranged the visit of acclaimed pianist Jon Kimura Parker through the Piano Six Foundation, felt the maestro’s tour of Manitoulin “was absolutely wonderful.”

Noting that Mr. Parker is “top of the line, and internationally renowned,” Ms. Scott analogized that “it was like having Gretzky visit.”

The visit was remarkable in two respects, Ms. Scott said. “It was really unique to have him on Manitoulin, but also because school children were able to have workshops with him. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

Mr. Parker entertained students in four Island public schools – Central Manitoulin, Little Current, Gore Bay, and Assiginack. Part of the reason for the school visits being concentrated in this area was economical, Ms. Scott noted, as Mr. Parker had his piano in tow.

Apart from the school visits, the piano virtuoso performed for a rapt audience in Gore Bay, at the community hall, where he “commented on the lovely acoustics,” said Ms. Scott.

While the pianist has “an incredible range, and can do anything from jazz to show tunes,” his material on this occasion was “all classical,” Ms. Scott remarked.

For the children, it was a different story. “He played the Simpson’s theme song, Charlie Brown music, music that goes with cartoons,” said Ms. Scott, adding that the exercise was intended to “focus children’s listening,” which is apparently did to great effect. “People worried the younger ones would be wiggly, but he just captured their attention.”

The Piano Six Foundation exists to treat people living in rural areas of Canada to the type of cultural experience that is normally limited to large urban centres. All six pianists who participated in the original program are from Canada, although all now live abroad.

Mr. Parker, who makes his home in Texas, was “really happy to see the fall colours, because he hadn’t been in Canada in the fall in a few years,” noted Ms. Scott. “He does a lot of travelling, playing over 150 concerts a year, so to fit something like this into his schedule was wonderful.”

Ms. Scott said she is “Still flying high” from the experience. “It’s just amazing to spend time with someone of that calibre.”