

Piano Six performer plays the Haskell

By Matthew Shepherd
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Those who want to hear world-class piano without making the long trip to Montreal and selling their first-born, for a concert ticket will have a unique opportunity to experience the best on May 28.

On that Friday evening pianist Janina Fialkowska of the Piano Six group will perform at the Haskell Opera House.

"A superb pianist with rare poetic feeling and lyrical elegance," writes the Chicago Tribune, Fialkowska is a specialist in the works of Chopin and Liszt who has released several recordings over the past decade and has won numerous awards for both albums and performances around the world.

BEST PART OF THE SHOW

The best part about the show is the ticket price, a mere \$15, and the good cause that the money goes towards. All profits from the show will go to the purchase of a baby grand piano for Stanstead College, a boarding school near the Vermont border. One of the co-ordinators of the project, Suzanne Petraki, has been involved in fund-raising at the school for the past several years.

"I'm a current parent," Petraki explains. "I've had two students at Stanstead College, the youngest is graduating Grade 11 this year." She brought the Piano Six group to the attention of her fellow fund-raisers a few years back, and is thrilled to see the piano collective involved with the school. "We decided this would be a good year to incorporate them into our fund-raiser. Initially, we were going to host Jon Kimura Parker, but he couldn't come. Janina Fialkowska agreed to come for 48 hours to do the show," she says.

The piano, should the fund-raising go as well as Petraki hopes, will be placed in Pierce Hall, part of the boys' residence Davis House. "It's the main meeting place for theatrical events, assemblies and guest speakers, and has been in need of major repairs for several years," Petraki says. "They asked several people to come onto a board to improve the hall with new curtains, seating, a sound system and so on."

GOODWILL

What particularly amazes Petraki about the group is the wealth of goodwill that buoys the project. "The (members) offer their talents to communities that can't afford musicians of their caliber and waive their normal fee for expenses," she said. This impressed her the first time she heard of the group, back in 1996.

"I was driving home from Knowlton and listening to Art Talks on the CBC," she recalls. "They were interviewing a Piano Six artist. The idea and the generosity behind the group touched my heart. I thought that since the Haskell brings in guest performers, we should try it. It was shelved for a little while until the timing worked out well for both them and us."

Now, Piano Six is sending one of their emissaries to Stanstead to help the school with their piano-purchasing project. "I met [Fialkowska] 11 years ago, and she was a wonderful, warm person," Petraki says. "I'm sure she's going to give a warm concert that the audience can really get involved in."

300 PEOPLE

Petraki is hoping for 300 people to come and see the globally lauded concert pianist. "That would really be above our expectations," she says. "The pianos they have been looking at range from \$15,000 to \$18,000," so even a premium turnout at the Opera House will be but a step along the road to a new piano for the school. Even with much more fund-raising in the future, Petraki feels that the Piano Six ethos of musical generosity will make this a highlight of the entire campaign.

"These people are world-renowned but make themselves available to people who normally wouldn't drive to Montreal and pay \$25 to \$50 for a ticket," she enthuses. "They allow people to see world-class musicians in the comfort of their own community."

The Record
Sherbrooke, PQ
Dailies
Circulation: 5,800
21 May 99