

Artist tests out 'Ferrari of pianos'

Russian pianist Nikolai Demidenko paid a visit to a Langley resident's Fazioli piano.

Bethany Meckelburg, Langley Advance
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As Nikolai Demidenko sits with his head bowed over the keys of the 278 cm long Fazioli concert grand piano, the audience falls into a breathless silence.

Every eye is on his folded hands, drawn in by the contrast they make to the black and white keys of the piano and tuxedo, framed by a wooden panel in the background which shines like the gold used in iconic paintings to represent heaven.

It seems fitting, as the music about to be played will be celestial.



The Fazioli piano purchased by a Langley resident is an F212, which simply means it's 212 cm long. This particular piano cost \$115,000. Bethany Meckelburg/Langley Advance

But 24 hours earlier, Demidenko was in a completely different concert setting.

Seated at a Fazioli in a Langley home, the musician was watched by a similarly rapt audience perched on a collection of dining room chairs, waiting on one of today's most powerful pianists.

The Russian-born pianist arrived in Canada the day before his July 30 concert at Vancouver Playhouse and visited a Langley resident who recently purchased a Fazioli piano, Demidenko's personal favourite.

"To me, they are the best," he said. "There are not enough of them."

Demidenko owns an F183 Grand Piano, and has visited the unconventional factory northeast of Venice, Italy, where it was made.

"It looks like the place where pianos are born. They are alive," he said. "You take that piece of wood, you hit it with a finger, and it sounds. It's the first cry of a baby. It's one of the miracles of the world."

Fazioli pianos are relatively new in the musical world, arriving in the early 1980s, but they are already gaining a reputation.

"They're commonly thought of as the Ferrari of the piano world," said Manuel Bernaschek, managing director of Showcase Pianos in Vancouver, one of two Fazioli dealers in Canada.

"It's a gem, isn't it?" he said, as he gestured to the other room where the piano was displayed and where Demidenko could be heard saying to the new owner, "Lucky you; they don't get any better than this."

Each detail on a Fazioli piano is painstakingly hand-crafted, from the outer structure to the inner, hand-formed soundboard made of spruce wood from the same forest Antonio Stradivari used to make Stradivarius violins.

Some of the pianos feature inlays of mother of pearl and semi-precious stones, and many of the brass parts within the piano are coated with 18K gold. Those little extras add up to make Fazioli pianos some of the most expensive in the world, ranging in price from \$75,000 to \$409,000.

It takes three years for one piano to be made, and only 120 are completed each year.

Paolo Fazioli, the company's founder, tests each piano himself before it is declared finished. And as a pianist and an engineer, he's more than qualified.

"In 27 years, they haven't produced a bad piano," said Demidenko. "[And] it looks the way it sounds."

"One of the things that there is a deficiency of in the world is beauty, real beauty that can save the world, and that," he said, pointing at the piano, "is one of the things of beauty. If we remember this exists, it will be impossible to destroy the world."

The Langley Fazioli owner said she went to the Junos and watched as eight different acts set up and took down different pianos based on the musicians' requests.

"Now I can appreciate that," she said. "Once you've played on a Fazioli, you never want to go back."

It's a sound that can always be recognized, said Demidenko, and that, after all, is what the makers were going for.

Some of the pianist's last words in Langley, the day before his concert, came to mind as the first chord of Mozart's Præludium and Fugue in C major washed over concert goers at the Playhouse:

"Jimmy Page once said, 'Listen mate, it's in the noise.'"

And coming from the fingers of Demidenko and the keys of a Fazioli, what a beautiful noise it is.

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