

THE TRI-CITY NEWS

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That's about \$2,300 per key (the bench is extra)



Pricey Fazioli pianos are handmade and one is now in a local home.

By Sarah Payne
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You could say a Fazioli is like the Ferrari of pianos but the comparison would fall short. Invoking the name of the legendary violin maker Stradivarius brings you a little closer but it's not until you hear a Fazioli being played that you understand what all the fuss is about.

Not many people get the chance, though.

Each Fazioli is made by hand, one at a time, and takes about two years to build, so there aren't many out there.

And with a price tag that starts at \$75,000 and skyrockets up to the cool half-million mark, they aren't the kind of pianos sitting in your average living room for little ones to learn "Chopsticks" on.

But an Anmore resident, whose Fazioli sits in a nook just off the kitchen that looks like it was custom-built for the instrument, gets to tinkle the ivories of a pyramid mahogany version — the only one in Canada, mind you — on which she likes to play some Billy Joel, a few Elton John tunes and a smattering of Vince Guaraldi's Charlie Brown songs.

She wasn't home the day *The Tri-City News* was invited to take a look at the truly grand piano, which comes with a whopping \$200,000 price tag — the bench costs extra — but Scott Xiao, a 10-year-old Burnaby kid and budding piano genius, was on hand for a brief, stunning performance.

Scott's hands may be small but they move exceptionally fast. As he played Un Sospiro by Franz Liszt and Maurice Ravel's Toccata, they ranged all over the keys, top to bottom and hand over hand and back again in a dizzying display of musical prowess.

That a youngster could play so well was beyond impressive but the sound that floated up from that piano, from the first note to the very last, was incredible. It filled the vast room, with its 18-foot ceilings, each and every note perfectly distinguishable even as Scott seemed to play all 88 keys at once.

At home, Scott practices on a Yamaha grand, which is nothing to sniff at. But playing a Fazioli? Pretty cool, he said.

"It's easier to control and the sound is much better. It's more warm, less metallic. The songs just sound better."

The lighter, crisper, cleaner sound is a Fazioli trademark.

"It's like clinking two crystal glasses together" is how the homeowner described it. Fern Bouvier, chair of the Place des Arts board of directors, is also a fan. "What impresses me the most is, with most grand pianos, the central portion of the keyboard is very clear and the action is very good but the bottom part of the 88 keys sounds a little muddy and the top part has a very sharp, tinkly sound to it.

"The Fazioli piano, from the lowest notes to the highest notes, you get a perfect sound."

It's the kind of sound that carefully combines both art and science, and is the brainchild of Paolo Fazioli. He started out as a pianist, went on to become an engineer and, one day, decided to make good on his dream to build a better piano. A lot of people told him not to bother, that the venerable Steinway couldn't be beat.

"It is an instrument that has existed for 200 years," Fazioli said of the Steinway on a recent trip to Vancouver. "It's a very good piano but nothing is changing in many years, and they are producing a big quantity. It's like a Mercedes: It's very respectable. But our piano is made one by one, by hand, with special care."

Only the finest materials go into the Fazioli pianos. They're built in a factory near Venice, an area known for its woodworking tradition and the place where Antonio Stradivarius sourced the materials for his famous violins.

The pyramid mahogany model is especially rare because the veneer is created by matching the roots of mahogany trees into a distinctive pattern, a process that can take months.

"You have to glue one piece by one piece, it's very complicated," Fazioli explained. "And in nature, sometimes it goes one way, sometimes another way, so the people combining them must be very skillful.

"The material is very, very expensive," he adds with a grin.

Needless to say, the Fazioli is a special instrument.

Bouvier wants one for a proposed new Place des Arts performance venue and teaching facility. It already has half a dozen grand pianos but a Fazioli would attract a whole new calibre of teaching staff, and when you've got a large hall that can seat up to 600 people, you need an instrument that will project.

"It's got the most power and harmonic richness," Bouvier said, admitting that fundraising will be necessary but could be tough. "With a Fazioli, you're going to make a lot of noise and the noise is going to be of the very best quality. "People ask me, 'Would you let the students bang away on it?'" Of course, he answers — Faziolis are built to last.

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Scott Xiao, a 10 year old piano whiz, tries out a \$200,000 Fazioli piano in an Anmore home