

ARTS

Editor: Dave Paulson > Telephone: 250-380-5346 > Email: features@timescolonist.com

■ TELEVISION, B10

Striving for perfection

Luxury piano manufacturer Paolo Fazioli says each instrument he makes is a quest for an ideal

AMY SMART
Times Colonist

It's an unusual setting and an unusual event and it all screams decadence.

An anonymous Cadboro Bay homeowner has volunteered his sparsely-furnished living room to host a piano from one of the most expensive lines in the world — and the luxury piano-maker himself.

A 20-something tattooed woman answers the door in an apron, tends to the children and sets a platter of biscuits on the table. The piano will remain here for photos before being moved, hours later, to its nearby rightful home — also anonymous.

The piano is a Fazioli and it's the first of its kind on Vancouver Island. While Steinways may be known as the fanciest pianos around, Faziolis are actually the most expensive, based on the regular black piano line, with prices ranging from \$90,000 to \$220,000.

It's a particularly special occasion because Paolo Fazioli himself will make a quick stop in town for the event. This is like having Mr. Ferrari escort one of his cars — when talking about Faziolis, the perfect machines are often compared to luxury cars.

Anticipation has been building for his arrival. And then, in a flurry of action, he and his small entourage are here.

Within minutes, Vancouver-based concert pianist Daniel Chow is playing away. Mozart's *Turkish March* explodes with enormous sound and Fazioli leans on the piano and peers over the keys, grinning.

There's a distinctly boyish quality about the luxury piano-maker, who plinks a few notes of the *Turkish March* following Chow's performance. He's wearing a houndstooth tweed jacket and salmon-coloured tie — and when he perches on the piano bench, he stretches his legs out in front of him and looks at his feet with



Famed piano maker Paolo Fazioli watches pianist Daniel Chow perform on one of his creations. The luxury piano is the first of its kind to come to Vancouver Island. Fazioli's company makes between 100 and 120 a year, and Paolo tests each one before it is delivered.

BRUCE STOTESBURY, TIMES COLONIST

glee. He's wearing only socks.

Fazioli has a thick Italian accent and has a habit of repeating things. Your father was a furniture maker? "Si. Si, si si si," he says.

But it wasn't his father who taught him the art of piano-making. Fazioli grew up in Italy studying piano performance, but graduated as an engineer.

"I decided to join those two knowledges," he says. "The scientific knowledge and the artistic knowledge of making pianos."

Since launching his com-

pany 30 years ago, Fazioli has kept production low and controlled. Each year, 100 to 120 pianos come out of a single factory in Sacile, Italy — and they've been played by the likes of jazz master Herbie Hancock and Bach-interpreter Angela Hewitt.

Fazioli himself personally tests each one of his instruments, crafted with wood from the same red spruce forests in the Italian Alps that Antonio Stradivari insisted on using for his violins, in the 19th century. He says they've made improvements over time, but his

team is always striving for an unachievable level of perfection.

"We are looking for this," he says. "One that is more ideal than the reality."

Fazioli doesn't have a favourite model, calling himself a father who loves all his sons. He'll never compromise on sound by making upright pianos — only grands, like the first piano ever made. He'll only compromise in his own life, calling himself a businessman first, because all artists must be businessmen if they hope to be successful. He relates the very

best sound a piano can make to the undefinable "bel canto italiano," a phrase that has no real meaning but nostalgic connection to lost, operatic songs. The piano must also have a sound that can be easily molded by the pianist.

"It's like having materials that you can easily manipulate," he says. "This is important."

Chow has been playing in the background, all the while.

He echos Fazioli's words, saying it's very easy to extract the sound he wants.

He points to the carefully crafted interior.

"It's very unusual to have that sort of detail and beauty on the inside," he says. But while luxury pianos are a treat, it doesn't really make a difference to him, he says.

"For me, music comes from the person and from the heart," he said.

"No matter what the piano — if it's a sort of luxury brand like the Fazioli, or if it's something in an old retirement home — it doesn't matter, as long as everyone enjoys the music." asmart@timescolonist.com