

Music comes full circle Friday in Great Artists series



By Brock Weir

Whether it's music, art, or life itself, budding piano star Han Chen believes everything comes full circle.

And things don't only go full circle, but there is often a natural path we can't help but follow.

Modern aviation might be bringing the 24-year-old pianist from China to his Aurora engagement with just hours to spare this week, but it was another far more organic force that set him on the path which would ultimately lead him to headline the first in the Aurora Cultural Centre's Great Artists Piano Series of 2017.

Mr. Chen, a native of Taiwan, who started the week finishing up an engagement in Shanghai, makes a stop at the Aurora Cultural Centre this Friday, January 20, before returning to school at Boston's New England Conservatory.

Having recently finished recording an album for the classical Naxos label with Grammy winning producers ? and Aurora residents Bonnie and Norbert Kraft ? he says he is looking forward to putting together a show that is ?wholesome? with a story from beginning to end.

?I am presenting a program ranging from Haydn to contemporary music,? he says, noting Friday's concert will afford him the opportunity to mark the Canadian debut of Shiu-an Chang's Samsara. ?In Indian Culture, that means people's life is like a circle and there is a circle to life that is fascinating and never-ending. When I program [a concert] I want it to have a wholesome feeling, something that will have a story from beginning to end.?

But it is not a program that will be the same story from beginning to end; Haydn's Sonata and Schumann's Humoresque will collide with contemporary pieces that have been contrasts. As much as they contrast, however, they are united by common bonds that will be clear to the ear.

Chen has designed his program to conjure up a specific reaction in the listening audience, something similar to what he felt when his fingers first made contact with a piano.

He was four years old when he first sat down at the keys. The ?sparks?, he said, were clear right from the first contact. Receiving a piano as a birthday gift from a family friend, the instrument soon became a natural extension of himself.

?It was very cumulative,? he says of the moment he made the decision to pursue a career as a professional musician at just 13. ?I feel making music is something that really connects with people, so I enjoy not only playing the piano but connecting with that audience, which I believe is a very important part of the concert. When I played my first concerto with an orchestra, it sparked the decision to become a pianist in life. That moment of making music with everyone on stage, sharing everything so smoothly with an audience made me realise this was something I wanted to do with my life.?

From that very moment with the Beijing Orchestra, his path took him first to study in Shanghai and then onto the United States and Juilliard for his undergraduate and Masters degrees.

Despite taking home the first prize in the Sixth China International Piano Competition, he credits recording his debut album with the Krafts as the most rewarding experience of his young career.

?The recording process made me realise that performance has a power that can be passed on if you make it right,? he says. ?People

ask how you can judge a performance to be good or not, but it is the chemistry in the performance that will actually move the hearts and be successful. By doing the recording, I tried to find what the components are that make a successful recording and that really made me find something that is very special in the performance that will be remembered and I can pass on.?

But, to see the performance live and in person, you only have one chance to do so close to home. Tickets for Friday's concert are on sale now from the Aurora Cultural Centre. Tickets are \$34 for adults and \$28 for seniors and students. For more information, call 905-713-1818. Showtime is 8 p.m.