

About The Pianists

“As for the Players Who Came, their welcome could easily extend to twice the length of the movie.” -- Janos Gereben, San Francisco Classical Voice

“Philadelphia music teacher Annette DiMedeo was told early in her career by the Liberace organization that she said needed an act to succeed -- so she became a pianist-ventriloquist with a wooden dummy substituting as her "manager."... France's tennis coach Anne-Marie Rouchon, once played against Billie Jean King... Henri-Robert Delbeau is a tango-happy internal medicine physician from Jackson Heights. Greg Fisher runs a glass mirror shop in Edmond, Okla., and is not shy about divulging his unsavory past as a cocaine addict. Esfir Ross is a jolly dental assistant from Oakland, Calif. ("I have all my teeth!"). And from Fort Worth, meet jeweler James Raphael, who in 1995 composed variations on the Hativka, Israel's national anthem, as a dedication to Holocaust victims..." -- Bill DeLapp, Syracuse New Times

Esfir Ross on the competition....

Esfir Ross – who according of Avi Offer, NYC movie guru “steals the show with her, charisma, abundance of energy and sense of humor” is a dental assistant living in Oakland, CA. Prior to the competition she was battling depression, and felt a lack of purpose in her life. She said “I had no idea that the competition existed, and by chance while at a friend’s house I found out about it just before the submission deadline...”

She did not expect that “the competition would change my life completely. It gave me a great purpose – to practice and perform for an audience, and now I’m going around the world, playing in different competitions, meeting people. I could not imagine that I would shake hands with Van Cliburn, and play in front of such a jury which includes people like Veda Kaplinsky, the head of the piano department at Juilliard, and Richard Dyer, the renown music critic.”

Clark Griffith and AIDS...

Clark Griffith, an AIDS survivor from Fort Worth, states in the film that “homosexuals are the last people it’s ok to feel uncomfortable about”. He says that his mother had “made him the poster boy for AIDS awareness for the past twenty years, so I was happy to tell my story in the film”.

He’s a conservatory-trained pianist, living in Fort Worth, but prior to the competition had yet to connect with the local music scene. He was thrilled to participate in the competition: “I liked hearing other people play music I love, and also seeing if people liked my playing as much as I do... and it was great to have something to drag my family to that’s not only me playing...”

Ken Lisaka on the film crew:

Ken Lisaka – an investment analyst from Mill Valley, CA – talks about the competition, and his participation in the film:

"I have been playing the piano since I was a young child, and music has been a very important part of my life. As a professional in a different field, I yearned to connect with other amateur pianists, and my passion led me to participate in the competition to share my love with others. It was a gathering of kindred spirits, and I made important life-long friends.

Alex and the entire film crew were a part of the kindred spirits. Their passion and compassion in the art of filmmaking inspired me through their retelling of our tales, something very personal to us."

Some pearls of wisdom from the pianists:

Dr. Drew Mays from Birmingham, Alabama is also conservatory-trained pianist. He stopped playing for fourteen years while he studied and trained as a Pediatric Ophthalmology Surgeon. He wanted to go the competition to dispel stereotypes about Alabama "which is in the news for all the bad things". He also laments: "it's a sad tribute to classical music that we have these phenomenal musicians who aren't making their living in music because there just isn't the demand for it."

Henri-Robert Delbeau, an African-American Medical Internist, living in Long Island began to play the piano at age seven and later earned a master's degree in piano performance from the University of North Texas. In 1994, he obtained his medical degree from Cornell University College of Medicine. Although devoted to his profession, Dr. Delbeau feels that the "true meaning of life lies in our communion with our spiritual side." He compares his preparation for the event to "training for a marathon".

Greg Fisher, a recovering cocaine addict, attributes music, and his marriage to a fellow-pianist Miho Fisher, to his recovery. In his spare time teaches music to people with disabilities.

James Rafael, a jeweler from Fort Worth, made his living selling jewelry door to door while he studies, played and composed. In the film he plays his own variations on the Hativka, Israel's national anthem, as a dedication to his relatives who died in the Holocaust.

Mark Fuller – an attorney from Phoenix – talks about having three lives – a family, work, and musical life.

Slava Levin, an IT manager from Kansas City tells the audience: The great composer Igor Stravinsky says "If you can earn a million dollars any other way than music...do it!"

And Jelena Vladicovic, also from Phoenix says: **“It doesn’t matter if you’re a professional or an amateur. The amateur does it for the love of it.”**

About the Music

At the very end of the credit roll, we write:

The filmmakers also wish to thank: Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy, Gershwin, Joplin, Liszt, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Ravel, Schubert, Schumann, et al.

Truer words could not be spoken.....

Lori Miller, producer, also an amateur musician who’s childhood was spent playing and attending concerts, thought she was well-versed in all matters of classical music. As the footage started pouring in from Alex Rotaru, the director, and the crew as they traveled the world interviewing pianists, she was absolutely stunned not only by the level of playing, but the depth and variety of repertoire. There were **many** pieces she and Alex – who is also an accomplished pianist -- were completely unfamiliar with.

There are almost 100 separate musical selections in the film. Alex explains: “when it came to the music selection, we had to choose from an embarrassment of riches; we finally settled on a balanced program of great classical masterworks spanning Pre-Classical to Modern in an attempt to respect both our competitors’ strongest performances and the historical variety and diversity of the musical styles they embrace.”

Filmmaker Harrison Engle served as Senior Editor on the film. He says: “We all were incredibly impressed with the musicality and sensitivity of these competitors. When we got together in the editing room, we found we had many hours of fascinating material. I think our goal was to find cinematic ways to let the music speak to the audience. Our shots and cutting were kept simple and strong. Hopefully, the audience will be as moved and inspired as we were. Wonderful art has emerged from these amateur players.”

Many have remarked that each pianists' musical selections uniquely reflect each of their personalities.

Esfir Ross: playful, and at heart a comedienne – plays Cimarosa, Nin-Culmell, and Staius Mueller.

Clark Griffith: thoughtful, complicated, exacting, and with a dry sense of humor plays and transposes Bach.

Eberhard Zagrosek: a German physicist plays the classic Germanic composers – mainly Mozart and Beethoven.

Mark Fuller: a true intellectual, with laser-beam focus plays complicated more modern works including Prokofiev and Barber.

Henri-Robert Delbeau: soulful and reflective, plays Liszt and Schubert.

Ken IIsaka: a talented polymath...he beats to his own drummer and seeks out hardly known works by composers including Soler and Alkan.

Dr. Drew Mays: a burst of energy – husband, involved father of four, and busy surgeon with a surprising wit and zest for life plays lyrical, energetic pieces by Ravel, Rachmaninoff, Liszt and Schumann.

As the filmmakers screened the film at Festivals and private screenings – they were rushed by audience members asking – how can I get the soundtrack? And later received emails letting them know that they had filled their Ipods with classical music.