

LOCAL

Stamford piano series brings music to the people

By Ignacio Laguarda

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Liliya Bikbova and Yuliya Kirichenko sings a variety of classical opera songs, accompanied by pianist Alla Zouborev during a performance at the Stamford Government Center on June 18, 2019 in Stamford, Connecticut. From June 17 to June 21, a piano, generously on loan from Amadeus Piano Company, will be available for public use in the lobby of ...

Photo: Matthew Brown / Hearst Connecticut Media

STAMFORD — Maria Peña didn't need to wear a fancy dress or buy a ticket Tuesday afternoon to take in some opera.

All she had to do was walk into Stamford Government Center's lobby.

There, a triumvirate of Russian singers belted out Russian opera, Broadway tunes and jazz numbers as part of the Piano For The People series going on all week.

"In order to experience something like this, I need to go to a theater," said Peña, in Spanish, after the event. "This was beautiful."

Piano For The People is a first-year event that seeks to bring music to public spaces, said Lou Ursone, chairman of the Stamford Arts & Culture Commission. For this week, a Steinway baby grand piano donated by Stamford-based Amadeus Piano Co. will sit in the Government Center lobby, inviting anyone to play it.

To bring attention to the piano, three performances were scheduled for the week. On Monday, Cuban pianist Carlos Manuel Gomez played with vocalist Barbara Occhino. Mayor David Martin even got in on the act, playing "Piano Man" by Billy Joel.

On Tuesday, the Russian group Cantabile performed, as did the band Skeleton Crew 55, comprised of Kevin McGinley and Nick McGhee.

There is one more scheduled performance on Wednesday at noon featuring vocalist and pianist Emma Rae.

Ursone said the event is meant "to provide the enjoyment and the experience of live music in a place you don't normally get to." The appeal of placing a piano in a public space and bringing music to an unexpected area is that it makes the music accessible to a new audience, he said.

"The number of people who get to enjoy live music is way lower than you would like," he said. "Most people don't have the opportunity to get out and go to a concert."

The idea for Piano For The People came from Yury Feygin, the owner of Amadeus Piano.

He contacted Stamford Town Clerk Lyda Ruijter, with whom he has organized the Music In The Park series at Czescik Marina Park in the past, and told her about his idea of temporarily placing one of his pianos inside the government building.

He told her, "In your building we need some air, we need some light, some not-so-serious thoughts," Ruijter recalled.

The piano's last day in the lobby is Friday, which is also Make Music Day, a citywide event that includes 21 performances at nine different venues in Stamford.

John Varamo, program manager for the Stamford Arts & Culture Commission who works in the Office of Economic Development, said the piano program is one of many ways to bring people to Stamford.

"We're trying to make Stamford a destination, a place that really is a catalyst for arts and culture and music and theater," he said. "If you don't have art, and you don't have music and you don't have cultural institutions, then it's not a place that people want to live."

He added, "In terms of economic development, having a strong art scene is very important when companies are looking at relocating because they want to know if there are things to do for their staff and their employees."

The volume of people who walk through Government Center made it an attractive space to explore. On Tuesday, a steady stream of city employees and visitors to the center walked in and out of the building, many taking a moment to watch the performance before going about their day.

Liliya Bikbova, one of the Russian singers, called the piano series a "wonderful idea."

"It lets all people listen to beautiful classical music," she said. "It brings less stress to people"

ignacio.laguarda@stamfordadvocate.com