

Wilmette's Takaki hopes to make a difference through music



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Eric DeGrechie, Editor
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Playing music for a large audience can be intimidating for many, especially when it's a solo performance. For Wilmette's Jarrett Mitsuhiro Takaki, the anxiety-ridden task is no big deal.

"I like performing in front of an audience more than anything else," Takaki said. "I'm just by myself and everyone's attention is on me, which is really cool. It's generally a fun experience to perform."

Takaki, 18, a senior at New Trier, recently formed the not-for-profit 88Keys to Cure with several other pianists. Through music, the organization is dedicated to "raising

awareness, advocacy and financial support for innovative and meritorious causes.” The name comes from pianos having 88 keys (52 white, 36 black).

Takaki, along with 88Keys to Cure co-founders Derek Chung, of Long Grove, Grace Tu, of Glenview, and Sophia Li, of Vernon Hills, decided the first cause they wanted to tackle was helping premature and critically ill infants. The group found the perfect partner in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago.

“We met with Dr. Nana Matoba and everything kind of just fell into place there,” Takaki said. “The group has always wanted to do something with children. We can use our musical talents to spread hope and awareness to problems in the world.”

During a tour of the NICU at Lurie, Takaki and the others saw premature babies that were struggling to survive.

“That hit home. We just wanted to support the families,” Takaki said.

To facilitate this charitable endeavor, 88Keys held its inaugural concert on Saturday, April 1, at Nichols Concert Hall in Evanston. In solo performances, the pianists played works by Bach, Mozart, Chopin, Khachaturian, Barber, Garrop and Uehara. Takaki is familiar with the venue as he’s recorded some of his audition pieces there.

The four met in the piano studio of Sueanne Metz in Long Gove. Metz, an accomplished musician in her own right, has been teaching piano privately for 20 years. Through Metz’s instruction, the pianists have won regional, national and international solo piano competitions and have performed as soloists with orchestras throughout the United States and Europe.

“She is an amazing teacher and an amazing person,” said Susan Takaki, Jarrett’s mother. “She doesn’t just teach the kids to play the piano and win competitions. She inspires them to do things that they might not ever think of doing.”

Susan Takaki credits Metz, who helped organize the concert, for coming up with the idea of 88Keys to Cure and ensuring her son’s involvement.

“Since this is Jarrett’s last year in the studio, Sueanne really wanted to make it happen so that he could be part of it all before he left,” Susan Takaki said. “So in addition to all of the piano lessons, awards and opportunities that she has given him in the music world, she has given him even one more gift which will forever make him a more caring and compassionate person.”

Under Metz’s instruction from an early age, Jarrett Takaki started playing the piano when he was 5 after watching his brother and sister perform. From the beginning, his parents told him that he had a good ear for music and he was able to play compositions just by hearing them. His favorite composers are Alexander Scriabin and Frederic Chopin.

“The Scriabin number that I play is pretty jazzy, which is different from most of the stuff I play,” Takaki said. “Chopin is just generally beautiful.”

Though performing classical music has been his forte up to this point, Takaki is currently taking a composition class at New Trier and has begun creating his own pieces. He has not made a final decision on where he will attend college next fall but does know that he will be majoring in piano and computer science as a double major.

To learn more about Takaki and 88Keys to Cure, visit 88keystocure.org.