

Public Piano Installation Proposal

Concept

If approved, I would install a small, full-size upright piano outside in a publicly accessible area. The instrument would serve a dual role as a muralistic artist's medium, and an open opportunity for musical expression. In the interest of instrument preservation, I intend to remove the piano at an appropriate time in the fall.

Introduction

In the early fall of 2013, 75 pianos decorated by local artists were dispersed through the streets of Boston by an organization called Play Me, I'm Yours. Two still exist today, and the rest have been donated. On their website, streetpianos.com, countless images and videos can be found of the beautifully painted pianos drawing local musical talent. Several piano students at Island Music had the pleasure of visiting and playing these pianos. I've since become aware of similar projects in Santa Barbara CA, Sarasota FL, and my hometown of Lancaster PA. I endeavor to emulate this wonderful community movement here on Martha's Vineyard.

Installation and Purpose

There are many decent quality upright pianos sitting unused in homes, appearing for free in the newspaper, or simply being thrown away. Many require just several hours of dedicated repair work and/or tuning to function as an enjoyable, playable instrument. Making one of these publically accessible will bring joy to many talented pianists who lack either the funds or the space to have one at home.

The weather here can be harsh on a piano kept outside. With proper care and upkeep however, our chosen donated instrument should easily weather the 5-6 planned months of outdoor use. To protect the piano, I'd employ the help of some interested local caregivers to cover the piano overnight (from 8-9PM until 8-10AM) and in inclement weather. I would also provide a sign with several etiquette guidelines, both to aid caregivers and to act as a deterrent to misuse.

The drive behind this project is to draw in and connect as much of the island's artistic community as possible. I plan to commission several local artists to paint the piano. This will bring exposure as a visual art exhibit. I expect the artwork will inspire both local musicians and talented visitors to musically engage. I would, of course, make regular visits and encourage my music students to do the same.

Possible Challenges

I would consistently monitor the state of this project throughout. Considering the quality of artwork involved, and the planned overnight cloaking of the instrument, vandalism is highly unlikely, and I have not heard any cases of this in other areas. I also have not encountered any documented noise complaints in researching other projects. I expect weather to be the largest possible obstacle, and if the piano's condition deteriorates to the point where it can no longer function musically, I will remove it from the outdoor location.

Depending on the location, the pedestrian draw of the object may pose crowd control issues. All considered locations will be in a safe and spacious area. Any small crowd attracted to the instrument should not become disruptive to local businesses or through-traffic.

Greater Mission

There is one major motivator behind my drive to make this dream a reality; a mission to eliminate the barriers and stigmata related to public performance and busking. In much of the US, I have found the atmosphere surrounding impromptu street performance unwelcoming. In many foreign places I have travelled to, street musicians are welcomed and celebrated as uplifting, positive members of the community, and garner liveable wages with their talent and dedication. It has always seemed to me that a world where public music is welcome and venerated is a world whose occupants can communicate openly and freely, and discuss emotional friction and conflicts to settle differences. I hope to do my own small part to foster that positive emotional exchange on this island I have come to call my home.

A Brief Bio

I am a musician and music educator here on Martha's Vineyard. I teach classical piano, fingerstyle guitar and ukelele both through Island Music and privately. I also instruct a weekly ukelele class at Featherstone. I've assisted on several piano repairs and tunings with Ed Griggs, owner of Island Music. Having started a long journey with piano lessons at 3 years of age, I constantly nourish an undying passion for music and the arts as a whole.