



Silotissimus Closes out Concert Series

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Story & photos by Andi Bourne, Pathfinder

University of Montana Music Professor Steven Hesla and Missoula native pianist Barbara Blegen brought the music and influences of Alexander Siloti and Sergei Rachmaninoff alive on dual concert grand pianos to close out the 2 Valleys Stage 2013-2014 concert series.

Cellist Fern Glass Boyd also played "Sonata for Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 18" composed by Rachmaninoff along with Hesla.

Nearly 150 people attended the concert at Seeley-Swan High School (SSHS) April 13 including many of Siloti's descendants who live throughout Montana including Condon.

The University of Montana donated the use of two, nine-foot Steinway grand pianos, one from 1947 and one from 1974. They were transported to Seeley Lake with the help of All Lanes Moving and Storage April 12. Mover Jim Anders said it was pretty rare to move grand pianos but they do not treat them any differently than anything else they move.

"The biggest thing is to lift with your legs," said Anders.

"Each of these pianos would be worth \$175,000 new," said 2 Valleys Stage Program Director Scott Milner.



All Lanes Moving and Storage along with William Peabody and Scott Milner moved two grand pianos from the University of Montana to Seeley-Swan High School and back again for the 2VS Concert.

Hesla gave a pre-concert talk offering some of the man-behind-the-music information provided by "Lost in the Stars: The Forgotten Musical Life of Alexander Siloti" written by Charles Barber and the Siloti family.



Pianists Steven Hesla and Barbara Blegen performing Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18 for piano and orchestra composed by Sergei Rachmaninoff. Hesla jokingly said Blegen was his orchestra.

Siloti was a student of Liszt and known as a transcriber of music. He adapted to piano more than two hundred works originally scored for other instruments and is known as an adaptor of J.S.

Bach's keyboard works. Silotissimus was a nickname Liszt gave Siloti meaning, more of Siloti.

"Alexander Siloti had such great inspiration for what music could be and could do in a new way while still honoring completely the music of Bach. It was out of complete reverence for Bach," said Helsa.

Hesla shared stories of how Siloti was concertizing Rachmaninoff all over Europe and in the United States in the 1890s. Siloti conducted the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra Nov. 9, 1901 premiering his first cousin's work, Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18, for piano and orchestra. Helsa and Blegen played the first movement, Moderato, at the concert.

Siloti started the Liszt society and actually started the St. Petersburg concert series 1903-1917 amid the political turmoil, poverty and World War I and aftermath. Concerts were free to help keep up the people's spirits.

Alexander Siloti came to the United States from Russia in 1920 becoming an instructor at the Juilliard School from 1924 -1942.

"His musical depth and own generosity were in the same ways he received with such generosity from Franz Liszt for his own career and aspirations," said Helsa. "He paid it forward through support and reclamation. He believed in young artists."



Helsa and Blegen also performed during the informances, educational performance for area students, at SSSS April 14 for SSSS, Seeley Lake Elementary and Swan Valley School.



The Siloti family. Pictured (L-R): Grace's son Alex Blendermann, Grace Siloti, Len Kobylenski, Jennie Siloti, Mary's daughter Stevi, Mary Siloti, Bob Siloti and his wife Pam. Alexander Siloti was Grace, Mary and Bob's great-grandfather.