

AHS student aims to be Canada's "Piano Hero"



By Brock Weir

Since he first put his fingers on the white keys of the piano, Harrison Jarvis was instantly mesmerized by the recordings of Glenn Gould.

It is safe to say the Grade 11 Aurora High School student counts Gould, arguably one of Canada's most famous and storied pianists, as a hero ? but this week, Harrison is hoping to stir the same feelings in music aficionados across Canada.

Harrison is in the running to be named Canada's ?Piano Hero?, in a nation-wide contest hosted by CBC Radio and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) to name ?Canada's favourite amateur classical pianist.?

At press time, Harrison's YouTube audition had racked over 1,100 votes and listeners have up until midnight this Thursday, January 22, to vote for their top 10.

Winners of the contest will receive, among other prizes, a professional music video, a private piano lesson with the renowned Emanuel Ax, and a chance to take in the TSO's RBC Piano Extravaganza.

Once the entrants are whittled down to the Top 10, the ultimate winner will be chosen by a jury of piano professionals.

?This is such an incredible opportunity,? says Harrison. ?A performance with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra has always been one of my dreams and I have adored Emanuel Ax for many years.?

Although he has had a passion for music most of his life, studying under the direction of Aurora's Stan Cyprys for nine years, one significant experience took this passion to an entirely new level at the age of 14, having the chance to perform with the York Chamber Ensemble, conducted by Tony Browning.

?This was what really started to get me to fall extremely in love with music,? he says. ?It was the most unbelievable performance opportunity. It was my first time getting to perform with an orchestra, and it was an entire Bach concerto. It was a surreal experience and performing for all our friends and family was absolutely lovely.?

That experience laid the foundation for the true pursuit of his piano dreams. Instilled with a love of performance, he developed and clarified a set of goals with what he wanted to do with his musical career. His hours of practice, and the intensity of these practices, kicked into high gear. Now, he is at the point where he gets to practice four hours a day.

In balancing this passion with his school work, Harrison participates in Aurora High's co-op program, which frees up one credit, the time for which he can then devote to his piano. He makes regular trips to Philadelphia to study with Amy Yang of the Curtis Institute of Music.

Along with Gould, Harrison cites Yang and his Toronto-based teacher, Arsha Louise Neressian, as his chief musical influences.

"The value in going to Philadelphia is the remarkable teaching I receive down there," he says. "Every time I get to each lesson, [Amy] is consistently providing me with so much knowledge I just get so excited on every single flight home. I just absolutely adore getting to have the opportunity to make music, especially classical music. There is always so much you can find in a piece and you never plateau with your music. There are always ways to improve, there are always ways to interpret your music, and I just love that challenge ? and I just love getting to make music."

As he strives to make the Top 10 in the Piano Hero competition, Harrison has his fingers poised over the keyboard and his eyes on the prize. With three international piano competitions on his agenda for the months ahead, a professional video, such as the one up for grabs in Piano Hero, will go a long way for his audition process, he says. It will also come in handy when he begins auditioning for a spot in prestigious performing programs in his post-secondary career, including Curtis, Julliard, and the New England Conservatory of Music.

"My philosophy towards all of this is the more I work, the more effort I put into it, the more I get to understand music ? and I have learned from experience that the more I understand, the more I enjoy it ? I want to put myself in the position of being the best musician I can possibly be, and I would like to see where that can take me."

To take in Harrison's audition and, most importantly, vote for him, visit piano.strutta.com/entry/8296961.