

Grand Scholarship Winner Has Hidden Talents

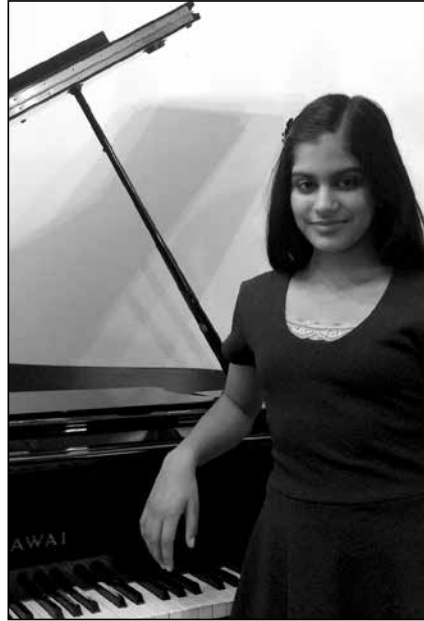
Don't let Aishani Saha's quiet voice and reserved personality fool you; she's a completely different person on stage.

She was just 6 years old when she started playing piano. Her mother studied Indian classical dance, and her father sings and plays guitar, so Aishani had grown up around art and music. She herself began learning Indian classical music when she was 5, began piano at 6, took up drama in middle school, and recently began taking Western classical voice lessons as well. And she won the 2014 PSF Grand Scholarship Competition in June.

"Aishani always seems like a very quiet girl," her teacher Kelli Stephens notes. "That is what makes her performances so impressive to me." Her audition took the audience members by surprise. While the delicacy of her touch on the lighter passages of her Mozart and Chopin pieces was evident, what really stood out were the more dramatic, bombastic sections. There was no shying away from the full dynamic range, no hesitation, and no question about the sound she was able to coax from the piano.

In all of her artistic pursuits, Aishani's comfort level on stage is obvious. In her voice teacher's studio, Aishani is a regular soloist in recitals on vocals and piano. She also enjoys acting in school productions, and recently participated in Westview High School's Gershwin review, after which she took part in the Regional Acting Competition. At the event, her solo vocal selections were loud and boisterous – definitely not the personality one observes in her when she is not on stage! Stephens reiterates, "She's a completely different person when she performs! I think I'm going to have to hear her sing... that's probably really something."

Aishani has been a student of Stephens since the age of



Aishani Saha, 14, winner of the 2014 PSF Grand Scholarship Competition

To see a selection of Aishani's visual art and a video of her performing at a recent Piano Santa event, go to www.pianosanta.org!

8. "Aishani is a joy to work with. She sets a high standard for herself, and works very hard, but she always has a smile on her face," Stephens says. Now 14, Aishani has already met with a number of successes on the piano, and says of her teacher "I feel very fortunate to be able to study with Kelli. I wouldn't have been able to achieve the things I have done so far in piano without her."

Aishani entered and won several Oregon Music Teachers' Association Classical and Romantic Festivals, and recently was a winner in the OMTA Trula Whelan Concerto Competition. When she first heard of the 2014 PSF Grand Scholarship Competition, she was excited both by the challenge and what winning might mean for her musical development. "When I heard about PSF from [Stephens], I really wanted to be a part of it."

In PSF's 20-year history, four of Stephens' students have now won Grand Scholarship Competitions. One of the great things about a PSF scholarship," Stephens observes, "is that it can totally change how a student plays. Grand pia-

nos really help you listen [to yourself] better; your technique improves, and it has a tremendous impact." For winning the 2014 Grand Scholarship Competition, Aishani has won the use of a Kawai RX-1 grand piano in her home for 2 years. Aishani agrees with Stephens, "Playing on the [PSF grand piano] helps me practice what my recital pieces will sound like." About the first year of her PSF scholarship, she says "I like to meet new people and hopefully I can be a good role model for the younger kids."

When asked about herself on stage, Aishani reverts back to her off-stage self. A pause, and then quietly, "I have fun."

Vox Academy Has Discovered Their Voice

Last summer, Piano Santa received a call that led to a conversation with Diana Bright, a teacher at Vox Academy in SE Portland. That conversation would later lead to one of our most successful community placements.

Most folks don't know that Piano Santa makes placements for pianos in the community, not just in our scholarship recipient students' homes.



*Beth Kahlen (singing) and Nevada Jones (piano)
from Vox Academy*

These placements are always with other non-profits and are generally made for programs that work with children in some way. Often times, there is a component of piano lessons involved, but sometimes the focus is on music therapy. Our placement at Vox was a bit different right off the bat: they don't teach piano! This wasn't a group that was coming to us through one of the usual channels and their situation was not our typical place-

ment. You see, they had lost an important participant in their fledging organization when a primary benefactor decided to move out of state and take their pianos with them. Vox is a voice school and couldn't easily teach voice without a piano! Diana was searching the far corners of Portland for any organization that had a piano to loan them, even in the short term. That's how she ended up calling us.

At first, we asked the typical questions of what they would use the piano for, how many children were served by their program, etc., and as she answered the necessary checkbox-type questions, we could hear something in her voice that wasn't about the desperate and difficult situation she was facing, it was about joy. When she spoke of this program, you could hear her passion and love for what she does. To give a person a voice for the first time is a powerful thing and that is exactly what is at the heart of the program at Vox Academy.

Now, nearly 9 months later, we finally had a chance to go visit the academy, see our piano in place and catch up on what they have done during these last few months of growing a board, securing equipment and reaching out to the community. Beth Kahlen, a senior faculty member at Vox and a gifted mezzo-soprano to boot, showed off the studios, introduced the faculty and exuded the pride and passion she felt for this program. She and fellow senior faculty member Nevada Jones gave a quick performance on the piano we placed with them. It's never sounded so great!

Yes, the organization has had to hit the ground running, yes they are actively searching for more board members as those few dedicated folks take on many aspects of non-profit governance while growing a successful program, and yes it's obvious that it's been a lot of hard work, but the sounds of those voices that fill the space make it all so very worthwhile.



PSF Program Basics

PSF was created in 1994 to provide music education opportunities for children, particularly in underserved populations, in the Portland metropolitan area. The three main focuses of our programming are

- (1) **Scholarships:** placing pianos in students' homes,
- (2) **First Step and Second Step Keyboard Programs:** offering group piano lessons to elementary-aged children, and
- (3) **Placement Grants:** placing pianos with deserving community organizations.

In support of these programs, we provide in-home piano tunings and maintenance, offer educational opportunities, and sponsor student recitals throughout the year. Please see our website for information.

PSF Board & Staff

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"Since I was little my dream is to learn to play piano." – M., age 9

"I love music very much, I love to practice every day and I love to learn new songs. Every season I go to a recital. I have SO much fun there, and music makes me happy." – L., age 9

Help PSF Keep the Music Alive!

Piano Santa is working to counteract the effects of decreased funding for music and the arts in public schools.

Did you know?

- In 2011, 40% of Portland elementary schools did not have music education and between 2011 and 2013, the Portland Public Schools dropped arts instruction in 22 schools.¹
- Local government spending on the arts dropped by 21% between 2008 and 2011.²

Some of the many benefits of music:

- Students of lower socioeconomic status who took music lessons in grades 8–12 increased their math scores significantly, and increased scores in reading, history, geography and even social skills by 40%.³
- In 2006, SAT takers with coursework/experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 43 points higher on her math portion than students with no coursework or experience in the arts.⁴



PSF Student at a 2014 Recital

- Young children who take music lessons show different brain development and improved memory over the course of a year.⁵
- Nearly 100% of past winners in the prestigious Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science, and Technology (for high school students) play one or more musical instruments.⁶

**Help PSF keep the music alive!
Volunteer or donate today.**

1 www.theartscan.org/arts-education-access-fund

2 2013 National Arts Index

3 Nature, May 23, 1996; Gardiner, Fox, Jeffrey and Knowles

4 The College Board, Profile of College-Bound Seniors National Report for 2006

5 Dr. Laurel Trainor, Prof. of Psychology, Neuroscience, and Behavior at McMaster University, 2006

6 The Midland Chemist (American Chemical Society) Vol. 42, No.1, Feb. 2005

GRACE NOTES



Our heartfelt thanks go to the following individuals, businesses, and foundations for their support of PSF programs, as well as to the many anonymous donors who have made generous contributions. Your support makes all the difference! If your name is missing from this list (and you wish to be added), please call our office, and we will be sure to make the correction in our next edition.

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CORPORATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS

A-440 Tuning
Classic Pianos
Mark Mention Piano Services
Oregon Community Foundation
The Monday Musical Club
Yamaha America

enriching life through music

2015 Event Dates

Summer Music Fun Recital and Picnic

August 8, 2015, 1:30pm
Classic Pianos
3003 SE Milwaukie Ave.

Dress Rehearsal

November 14, 2015, 10:30am
Portland Piano Company
711 SW 14th Ave.

Holiday Recital

December 5, 2015, 10:30am
Portland Piano Company
711 SW 14th Ave.



Scholarship Students, Board Members and Volunteers at the 2014 Dress Rehearsal
