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Notable Achievement

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Notable achievement

All-Steinway School designation strikes right chord



To be the best, the best is needed.

That's why Kansas State University's School of Music, Theatre, and Dance is an All-Steinway School — a distinction fewer than 200 schools in the world can claim.

Awarded in fall 2014 by Steinway & Sons, the All-Steinway School designation means at least 95 percent of the pianos used at the school are Steinways, which are considered to be the finest pianos in the world. A Steinway concert grand piano is handcrafted and takes nearly a year to create.

"The School of Music, Theatre, and Dance aspires to be the very best it can be in all areas of instruction and performance," said Gary Mortenson, the school's director and professor of music. "To do that to the fullest extent possible, the school needs the tools of the trade that allow creative minds to flourish. Steinway-line instruments make that happen in this very important area of our daily activities."

The All-Steinway School initiative started with the school's keyboard division faculty and captured the attention of Kansas State University alumnus Mark A. Chapman. His donation allowed the purchase of 40 new Steinway-line pianos and the refurbishing of six existing Steinway grand pianos.

A new Steinway can cost up to \$150,000, while refurbishing can cost \$25,000 per piano.

Sadly, Chapman died just as many of the pianos were being delivered. But his contribution is remembered through special plaques that are posted in the school's atrium in McCain Auditorium and at the entry to keyboard faculty teaching studios.

"Mark A. Chapman's generosity of spirit allowed this to happen," Mortenson said. "We are so fortunate that he came to believe in this initiative. Without his assistance we would not have this designation."

Now tickling the ivories, for both faculty and students, is a joy and a commitment to being the best.

"Having superior pianos demands exactitude in my teaching," said David Pickering, assistant professor of music. "No longer can anyone blame inferior equipment for less-than-stellar results, which holds one to a higher level of accountability in their teaching."

The All-Steinway School designation also is striking the right note with students.

"The opening of the 2014-2015 academic year represented the finest in the recent history of the keyboard division, not only in quality of students, but in the number as well," Pickering said. "No doubt the Steinway pianos they experienced as they either visited campus or read about from afar were a contributing factor to their choosing Kansas State University. We are the first university in the state of Kansas to be awarded this prestigious designation."

Having the best instruments for teaching and learning does make a difference, Mortenson said.

"Students and parents can sense quality when they see it. Steinway instruments are stunning to look at visually and a great joy to play," Mortenson said. "The better pianist you are, the more you recognize just what wonderful instruments these pianos are — and that makes a big difference. You don't really have to say anything. The quality of the pianos speaks volumes about Kansas State University's commitment to excellence."

By Beth Bohn



