

# Katya Grineva

## Making music her life

Russian pianist will perform Thursday night at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center

**F**ive years from now, if her fondest dreams pan out, Russian-born pianist Katya Grineva will be playing Carnegie Hall annually. She'll be touring Europe, Russia, the U.S. and South America.

By then, she'll have established "Pianos for Kids," a charitable foundation devoted to procuring pianos for deserving students. And she'll be residing — she's hesitant about divulging this — on Fifth Avenue.

At the moment Ms. Grineva's five-year plan is looking more and more plausible. This summer, she'll fly to Europe for a string of concerts. She's at Carnegie Hall on June 9 (her second concert there). And



**MICHAEL  
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**THE ARTS**

Pianos for Kids is beginning to take shape.

The only goal that seems distant is the Fifth Avenue address. Still, the insanely tight real estate market could soften at any moment. In a charmed life — and Katya Grineva's certainly sounds charmed — unexpected things happen.

By pure accident, the 29-year-old pianist will perform this week at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center, playing Liszt,

Chopin and Rachmaninoff. The engagement developed directly out of a chance meeting with a former trustee of the cultural center. Unforeseen good fortune is a recurrent theme in this musician's life.

Last week, she dropped by the Harbor (with a concert gown) to try out the newly tuned Steinway grand piano in Veterans Memorial Hall. "Oh yes, listen to this," she said, running off a little Rachmaninoff. "It sounds beautiful now."

The romantic piano repertoire — Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Liszt, Schubert — is her speciality. "It's the music that speaks to me." Her particular gift as a pianist? "People like my tone, my touch. I don't pound the keys."

Ms. Grineva, a softly pretty woman with dark blonde, wavy hair, looks the part. "Sometimes I feel as if I am from the period of Romantic music." She has a theory about her affinity for the era: "I think maybe I heard Chopin as a small child and was deeply affected."

New York's music critics have yet to hear Katya, as she calls herself professionally, although their counterparts in Baltimore and Buffalo have heard and raved

# Pianist

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("luminescent," "exquisitely refined"). She has made two CDs and a third is due any time now.

The pianist was born in Moscow into a non-musical home (her father was in cancer research, her mother was an historian). At six, she accompanied some playmates to their music lessons and began learning piano. She showed promise. Her mother rented a piano and told her that the instrument was hers as long as she continued to practice. Otherwise it would go back to the store. Katya kept at it.

She attended Moscow's High School of Music, and afterward, the Moscow Conservatory. "Music was my whole world," the pianist said. "I could close the door and play for eight hours."

At 19, she came to New York with her father, who was attending a conference at Memorial Sloan Kettering. She decided to stay and found an apartment on the Upper East Side. She auditioned for Juilliard, Mannes, Manhattan, and all offered scholarships. She took Mannes' package, and entered as a graduate student.

She did not undertake competitions — the standard route for promising young musicians. "Competitions are horrible and I am not good at them," she offered, "and if you study specifically for competitions, you end up sounding like everyone else."

Instead, Miss Grineva has concentrated on giving concerts, on playing for audiences as much as possible. She made her debut in Baltimore (with the Baltimore Symphony). She has played extensively in New Orleans. The Carnegie Hall debut, which she produced herself, was two years ago. Carnegie Hall is assisting her with the upcoming concert.

Again, unexpected benefactors have assisted her progress. Musician and broadcaster James Irsay heard her playing at the Mozart Cafe (the only Manhattan venue that offers classical music) and subsequently invited her to play on air.

In France a year ago, she sat down at a piano in a gallery. Upon hearing her, a woman came forward and immediately offered to arrange a series of concerts. Ms. Grineva no longer studies formally, although she has retained a group of sharp-eared and knowledgeable friends who can evaluate her playing.

One of her favorite teachers, Nina Svedlanova (now 98 years old and retired) told her several years ago: "All of the artistry you need is inside you. There's nothing more to learn. Just let it out."

On Thursday at 8 p.m. (in Veterans Memorial Hall) she will play Liszt's Soirees de Vienne (Valses-Caprices no. 7 and 6), Rachmaninoff's Prelude in G minor, Chopin's Ballade no 1 in G minor and Polonaise in A flat Major, Ravel's "Jeux D'eau" ("The Fountain") and Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata."

Tickets are \$20 (\$15 for members and \$7.50 for children under 12). For information, call 815-SNUG.



ADVANCE PHOTO ■ JAN SOMMA

Katya Grineva attended Moscow's High School of Music, and afterward, the Moscow Conservatory.