Piano Slam Mixes Classical and Hip-Hop at Knight Concert Hall

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Categories: Culture

Music and art programs are dropping out of Miami Dade Public Schools like flies hit by a cloud of Raid. Lucky for us, the private sector is stepping in with programs like Piano Slam to patch the gaping holes left by budget cuts.

Piano Slam Volume 3 is a celebration of music and art where classical piano mingles with hip hop, ballet, and spoken word poetry. The performance at the Knight Concert Hall, though, is representative of a lot of quieter, behind the scenes work involving the collaboration of local and international artists, champions of education, and even Miami Heat basketball players.

Piano Slam brings music and literary presentations to participating Miami-Dade middle and high schools, and offers students the opportunity to compete in a music-themed poetry contest, the winners of which will perform in the big show at the Center alongside professional artists and musicians.
Carlene Sawyer, creator of Piano Slam and executive director of the Dranoff International Two Piano Foundation, the driving force behind the initiative, says 61 of about 100 Miami middle and high schools will benefit from Piano Slam visits this year, up from 28 last year. These visits include live music performances, literary workshops, and sometimes even Heat players reading their favorite poems aloud.

"Music is the one art form that reaches all students every day, whether they live in Carol City, Fisher Island or Homestead," says Sawyer. "Piano Slam is an event that really lets their voices be heard on the role of music in their lives."

This year, the main event will feature international, award-winning piano duo Stephanie Ho and Saar Ahuvia, Miami hip-hopper DJ Brimstone 127, the Miami Conservatory's Thomas Armour Youth Ballet, and the works of about 15 winning poets from Miami-Dade public middle and high schools. The contest finalists will be trained and prepped to perform alongside the professional artists, and will be competing to win two laptops and $500 cash prizes. The show is directed by celebrated theater producer and playwright, Teo Castellanos.

The free show is at the Knight Concert Hall (1300 Biscayne Blvd., Miami) on Wednesday, May 4th, 7:30 p.m. Go to pianoslam.org or call the Dranoff Foundation at 305-572-9900.

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