

# The Birmingham News

## UAB takes delivery on final pianos to be all-Steinway school

Friday, April 06, 2007

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As a truck rolled up to the Hulsey Center to deliver two grand pianos Thursday morning, it marked a milestone for the music department at University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Steinway models B and D, 7 and 9 feet long, respectively, were the last of 32 pianos to be deposited in studios, practice rooms, rehearsal halls, offices and performance spaces. Along with the \$650,000 delivery came the designation "All-Steinway School," and department chair Jeff Reynolds couldn't be more pleased.

"If it's not the single most important event in the history of this department, it's certainly in the top two or three," Reynolds said. "It puts us at a commitment level with those major schools and conservatories who see the value of investing in the young talent of tomorrow."

UAB is one of 72 schools worldwide so named by piano maker Steinway & Sons, joining the Juilliard School, Curtis Institute, Yale University and a host of private and public colleges and conservatories. Steinway requires that 90 percent of the schools' pianos be Steinway or the Steinway-crafted Boston brand, and that the school is committed to maintaining the instruments.

UAB employs technician Kirk Alford, who spends one week each year learning new techniques at the Steinway factory.

Generally considered the finest piano-maker in the world, Steinway has been in business for 154 years. The company estimates that 98 percent of concert piano performances use Steinway grands.

"The Steinway School program is a special designation," said Sally Coveleskie, Steinway's national director of institutional sales. "It says that the

school is committed to providing the best possible instruments for the study of music."

It also comes with a substantial discount. Reynolds estimated that the retail cost of the 32 pianos would have topped \$1 million. The two largest pianos in this purchase cost the university \$76,000 and \$58,000, substantially less than the retail price. About \$250,000 has been raised for the purchase, leaving \$400,000 in the balance.

"We are still fundraising," he said. "We are aggressively seeking people who are friends who love music and love pianos."

Most of the pianos, which include 23 uprights and nine grands, were chosen from the Forbes Piano showroom in Homewood, but seven were hand-picked in New York by faculty members Dale Reynolds and Yakov Kasman. "The winners were not determined easily," Kasman said. "A piano should sound nice for those in the hall and for the performer and should feel well for the fingers. It should be responsive, with repeated notes that are clear and without difficulty, and have a solid bass register and articulate middle register."

Kasman acknowledged that the decisions were subjective, but they eventually came to a consensus.

"We were able to make excellent choices," he said.

### **Leasing Yamahas**

Until the Steinway agreement, UAB was leasing Yamaha pianos from Forbes, the same company that is handling the Steinway transaction. The 26 Yamahas will be returned to Forbes and sold.

UAB offers its 170 music majors degree programs in music, music technology and music education, but none in vocal or instrumental performance. Kasman hopes the Steinway association will put UAB in a more competitive position to offer the program.

"My piano studio today is very strong," he said. "Now I'm getting the best pianos available in the world. Students will feel the difference. I hope it will make a big buzz."

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