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'Play me, I'm yours'

BY TAYLOR CASEY | JULY 09, 2010 7:20 AM

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Ever wonder if you had what it takes to be the next Mozart or Beethoven? Well, here's your chance to potentially shine and show Iowa City what you've got.

A phenomenon called "Play Me, I'm Yours," which British artist Luke Jerram started in London in 2008, has recently been picked up in Iowa City by two businessmen — Mark Ginsberg and Marc Moen after given the go-ahead from the city.

The pianos will be available for the public to strike up random tunes and those who are musically inclined to show off their talents.

Real-estate developer Moen said he is rather optimistic that this will be something good for the town; after reading about success stories in such cities as New York and Denver, I couldn't agree with him more.

According to the "Play Me, I'm Yours" website, Jerram has installed 167 pianos in eight different cities worldwide. Each piano is uniquely decorated and personalized to reflect the different communities and people who reside there.

Typically, pianos are located in public areas — such as Iowa City's downtown.

Iowa City's first piano was placed in front of M.C. Ginsberg, 110 E. Washington St., and Moen placed a second piano in front of his Plaza Towers, 221 E. College St.

While I am a little surprised that Iowa City is one of the first few cities to pick up on this new and successful phenomenon, I have to wonder if once school starts back up in August whether it will be the best place to have these pricey pianos — what with drunken college kids strolling through downtown at all hours of the night (and early morning).

Moen doesn't expect any problems. He said the pianos will be out from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday and 10 a.m. until midnight Thursday through Saturday. He noted that the pianos will be bolted to the ground and securely covered late at night once they are off limits to the public.

However, I still am hesitant that a few bolts in the ground and covers will be enough to stop some of the reckless college students from messing with the instruments on their frequent excursions downtown on the weekends. They might not be able to remove the covers, but that still doesn't mean there isn't chance for vandalism.

Nonetheless, I am willing to surpass my doubts, because I for one am completely on board with this new project. Residents of Iowa City are always complaining that we need to come up with more activities and sources of entertainment that don't require alcohol. I think this is a great place to start and exactly what the town needs.

Plus, there are always tons of live performances on the Pedestrian Mall who attract passersby, not to mention the random person strumming a guitar late at night.

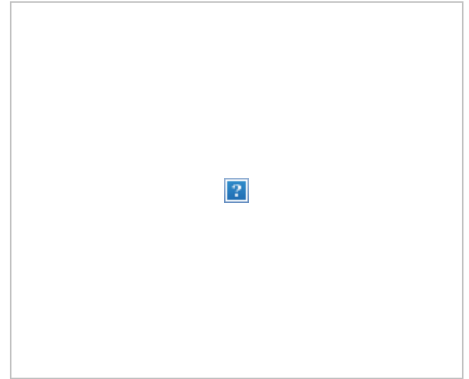
Moen said what was most interesting to him was, when they put the second piano out, within 10 minutes, people were not the least bit shy to strike up a tune.

Moen said an older woman was first to play and little kids gave it a go shortly after. A few younger performers showed some real talent.

Moen said the instruments work to "[bring] people together, all ages."

While it is obviously still too early to tell if Iowa City will have the same success as other cities, I for one am anxious to see some of the hidden talents of the community and just how successful this

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