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VILLAGER

FRIDAY, JULY 9, 2010



Waiting for you to come fill the chair and fill the air with music over the waterfalls!

photo by Mialie T. Szymanski

Play Us a Song, YOU'RE the Piano Man

MIALIE T. SZYMANSKI

NEWTON FALLS - Go ahead, sit down.

Come on over and play a while. (You know you want to.)

Imagine what it feels like to play a beautiful musical creation in harmony with the rushing accompaniment of one of nature's melodious masterpieces – you and Mother Nature in an impromptu duet. Actually, you don't have to imagine; the chance to find out firsthand is ready and waiting for the taking on the bridge over Newton Falls' namesake waterfall.

A recent addition to the town's scenery, an eye-catching brilliant blue upright piano has found an intermediary home overlooking the falls. The instrument is part of an art installation created by Luke Jerram, a UK-based artist who encourages citizens to connect

with the shared space of a public place.

Brightly painted for personality and visibility, these recycled pianos are being positioned in conspicuous, public locations all over the world, identifiable by the invitation "Play Me, I'm Yours."

Jerram states on his website that "questioning the ownership and rules of public space 'Play Me, I'm Yours' is a provocation, inviting the public to engage with, activate and take ownership of their urban environment." Local artist Christine Spletzer-Newman was inspired when she heard about the pianos in large cities such as New York and London and wanted to extend the concept to smaller towns. She contacted Jerram about his work and he gave her permission to create her own unique piano for use in the outdoor backdrop of Newton Falls.

Each piano is decorated to reflect a trademark of the town. Newton Falls' first edition is adorned with fireworks and misty waves, incorporating the weekend when it was placed (during the July 4th festivities) and its location (the town's waterfall). Future placements will document other aspects of the area's individuality and history. For now, the weatherproofed piano can be seen and played on the west side of Canal Street, by the McDonald's parking lot, until Labor Day. Early attendees to the Summer Concert Series starting Friday will be sure to notice its presence and, if so inclined, should feel free to answer the invitation to sit down and play a while. Traditionally, after each piano has had its time in the open-air spotlight, it will be donated to a local school or other facility to be appreciated even

further. Though not tuned to be a high-quality concert instrument, the piano is certainly musically playable and all are welcome to add their song stylings regardless of age or talent level.

So if you've ever wanted to know how Beethoven's "Für Elise" (or how about "Chopsticks" or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star") would sound live at a waterfall, the opportunity is at your fingertips – all you have to do is sit down and play.

Christine hopes the "Play Me, I'm Yours" pianos will continue to be a hit in our area, and would love your help in the effort. She's looking for any unwanted pianos that can be rescued and turned into works of public art, as well as a piano tuner who would be willing to contribute their knowledge and expertise to assist in making these instruments ready for placement.

Since this is a fledgling project for our town, Christine is also interested in suggestions of where the next Newton Falls piano should go. And if any other towns in our readership would like to see one of these intriguing visitors in a public place near you, please do give her a call.

For more information on the piano project and to see Jerram's versions from around the world, including London, Sydney, New York City, and Barcelona, visit <http://www.streetpianos.com>. If you have a piano you'd like to donate to the local cause, or just want to chat with Christine about future involvement, you can visit her at The Analog Art Studio in Newton Falls, or call (440) 781-4578. And when you're in town, do take a moment to stop by the waterfall and tickle the ivories – it's your piano, after all!