

Sweet Sounds

The Baltimore Music School celebrates its 10th anniversary.

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Staff Reporter

When Janna Friedman faces the music, she takes the interpretation literally. Ten years ago, Ms. Friedman, an immigrant from the former Soviet Union, opened the Baltimore Music School, and now she's celebrating a decade's worth of music making.

"Without music, life is not complete," she says.

After teaching piano at Peabody Preparatory for 17 years and seeing her own daughter finish at the Institute, Mrs. Friedman says she founded her non-profit school as an affordable alternative.

"Every child has to touch a piano," she says. "If he feels that he loves it, he has to continue. But he has to start, because music gives a lot of potential for everybody to develop their brains, to develop their souls, to develop different attitudes of life."

While Mrs. Friedman teaches only piano, her staff at the school teaches their budding musicians everything from clarinet to cello, trumpet to trombone. The school also has classes on theory and composing, and offers scholarships to dedicated students who can't afford the lessons.

Two of Mrs. Friedman's longtime piano students, brothers Alex and Eric Weaver, attend the Baltimore Music School even though both their parents, who are each faculty members at Johns Hopkins University, could send them to Peabody for free. The brothers say that they take lessons from Mrs. Friedman because of her commitment, and that through the years she has become like a "second mom."

"She has been more than a teacher because she has really taught me how to understand the feeling behind the music and convey that in my playing," says 17-year-old Alex. And Eric, 13, says, "Mrs. Friedman is an incredible role model and teacher. I simply can't thank her enough for how much she has truly enriched my life with music, and has

taught me to love all genres of music."

Mrs. Friedman, whose school puts into practice classical Russian methods, was born with player's hands. Her mother, Emily Yudina, was a well-known piano teacher in the former Soviet Union. And

"I feel that they will remember who their teacher was. They will remember for their whole life."

Mrs. Friedman, who started tickling the ivories at age 6, grew up to become a concert pianist. She even met her husband, Simon, after he saw her perform.

But in 1979, she left Ukraine to come to Baltimore with her husband to escape anti-Semitism and provide their two children with hope for a better life.

In the past decade, Mrs. Friedman has seen her school grow from around 15 students at its opening to around 100, with students from ages 4 to 77 years of age taking lessons. The school holds two recitals annually, with one planned for

next month.

While she still rents the space at her original Pikesville location, five years ago she opened a second spot in Owings Mills.

Several of Mrs. Friedman's students have gone on to become professional musicians. She says she gets a great deal of joy from hearing her students play and passing on her passion.

"I feel that they will remember who their teacher was. They will remember for their whole life," she says.

This past Saturday, Jan. 25, Mrs. Friedman says she enjoyed one of her greatest thrills. As winners of the American Fine Arts Festival, three of her students were selected to play piano at Carnegie Hall in New York City. One of those students was 13-year-old Esther Chervinsky, along with Marta Dian and Benjamin Starr.

"I love playing the piano and always will," says Esther. "Mrs. Friedman has been my teacher since day one and she has taught me so much, and I don't know how to thank her. When I play, I can't really describe the feeling, but all I can say is that it is great and the music really touches my heart." □

For information about the Baltimore Music School, call 410-653-2862.



Thirteen-year-olds Esther Chervinsky (left)