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Winston gives Arts Center a pull

Musician to perform benefit concert to offset state budget cuts

written by Jen Reeder

thesecondsection



Pianist George Winston will be playing a benefit concert July 2 at the Durango Arts Center to raise awareness for the arts and state budgetary cuts affecting them./Courtesy photo.

With the Colorado State Legislature slashing funding for the arts, community arts centers across the state are struggling to deal with budget cuts – and the Durango Arts Center is no exception. In an effort to help, internationally renowned pianist George Winston is performing benefit concerts to raise money for centers like Durango's and will be performing in Durango on Wednesday, July 2.

Just the facts

What: A benefit concert by George Winston for the Durango Arts Center

When: Wednesday, July 2, 7:30 p.m.

Where: Durango Arts Center, 802 E. Second Ave.

Cost: \$25 for DAC members; \$35 for nonmembers. Ticket holders may also buy special admission to a reception with a brief appearance by Winston in the Barbara Conrad Gallery following the concert for \$45/\$50. As with all Winston concerts, audience members are asked to bring canned goods, which will be donated to the local food bank.

Tickets/more info.: 259-2606

In a phone interview from his home in Santa Cruz, Calif., Winston said he's playing the benefit concerts because art is crucial.

"It's essential in a different way than basic necessities, but they're both essential," Winston said. "After you've eaten, what do you do? Some form of human expression." Though it may be viewed as essential, funding for the arts has been under fire for years. The most drastic cut came this spring when the state slashed its \$1 million budgeted for arts to only \$200,000, said Brian Wagner, executive director of DAC.

"The arts took an inordinately high blow," Wagner said. "We're a small portion of the

(state) budget, but the cuts were significant."

Wagner added that government support of the arts is particularly bleak in Colorado, "Depending on which statistics you believe, Colorado ranks 46th or 50th in public support of the arts."

As a result of the cuts, Wagner said DAC, which is in its 37th year, will lose 5 percent to 8 percent of its annual budget, or about \$28,000. The cuts will affect the center's bottom line in areas it is difficult to raise funds for, such as utilities, as well as the center's Exhibits Program, which showcases local and emerging artists.

That's where Winston comes in.

Wagner said the concert will help offset the center's costs as well as raise awareness for the plight of arts funding in Colorado.

"It's been a consistent aspect of his using his gifts, his talent and his name for raising awareness and support for important causes, and we're grateful that he has chosen the Durango Arts Center as an organization worthy of his attention," Wagner said.

Anyone familiar with Winston's recordings is familiar with his versatility, which ranges from "Peanuts" tunes by Vince Guaraldi, to his "Seasons" recordings, and Doors covers on his latest album, "Night Divides the Day." Likewise, anyone who has seen him in concert has experienced the awe of watching the piano maestro leave his Steinway to pick up a guitar or harmonica.

"It's not enough to just play the piano for me. With those three (instruments), I basically say what I want to say," Winston said.

Winston will play all three instruments at the DAC show, including slack key guitar, the Hawaiian solo finger-style guitar tradition that began in the early 1800s. Winston is recording the masters of Hawaiian slack key guitar for a series of albums on his label, Dancing Cat Records.

"I love the tradition, I love the music – that's it," he said.

Wagner said that though Winston is passionate about the causes he supports, he doesn't "preach" at his concerts.

"He comes and he performs – it's a concert," Wagner said.

For his part, Winston said he loves playing benefit concerts and touring – he averages 110 shows a year in the United States, Europe and Asia. He said that each place "has a feel to it," which he enjoys.

"I like going to each place and seeing how it changes the music and adds to it – it might be subtle, something in the improvisation, or it might be a whole new introduction," Winston said.

And Winston believes Durango should have a positive effect on his music, since he has visited numerous times to play and visit close friends.

"I can't be in Colorado and not play Durango," Winston said.

A handful of Winstonisms...

On recreational music: "I rarely listen to music unless it's something I'm working on. I listen to what's inside me – I'll put on...Sam Cooke and listen to it in my head."

On never singing: "The thing about music is, it's hard to translate into words. It's like trying to tell someone about green: you can get the idea across, but you really need to see it."

On playing solo: Though he admires groups like The Doors, he doesn't intend to start a band, though he was in one in the '60s "like most people my age."

On learning guitar after playing piano: "It's hard, but because of the piano, I knew what all the notes were. All I had to do was be able to find them."

On the differences between guitar and piano: "The same note will occur in more than one place on the guitar... It's like driving a car and riding a bicycle: it's the same general idea to move forward without hitting anything, but the way of moving forward is totally different."

On playing a number of instruments: "None of these instruments comes easy to me."

On art in the schools: "Sports are great, but it costs a fraction of sports to have a music program, and some places don't."

On advice to aspiring musicians: "Don't just memorize written music. Learn chords and later music theory. It's like knowing the names of streets."

– Jennifer Reeder

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