

The Bulletin

ARTS CULTURE

The Last Survivors Of Piano Row

[Print Page](#)

By D.J Boris, For The Bulletin

Published:

Thursday, December 18, 2008

Once, 13 piano merchants graced Philadelphia's "Piano Row," which extended from 6th and Chestnut Street to 23rd Street. Today, only one survives from that historic era, occupying a handsome art-deco storefront built in 1937. Jacobs Music was founded in 1900, the same year that the Philadelphia Orchestra came into existence.

Back then, in the days before the invention of television, the cost of a first-class stamp was two cents. Jump to 2008, and see that one thing hasn't changed: Jacobs is still selling pianos.

Walking by Jacobs Music's historic building at 1718 Chestnut St., you might be lucky enough to hear the beautiful music that's being played inside, brightening your holiday season.

"Just direct your feet to the sunny side of the street," wrote songwriter Dorothy Fields, in her 1930 lyrics. That's where Jacobs Music is, and that's where the pianos are — all four floors containing some of the world's finest.

Step inside this Philadelphia landmark, and it wouldn't be unusual to find a renowned concert pianist or aspiring artist practicing on a Steinway grand piano that would then be delivered to his or her performance.

The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Curtis Institute of Music, the Academy of Music, the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, Emanuel Ax, Luciano Pavarotti, Frank Sinatra, Dave Brubeck, Herbie Hancock, Norah Jones and Ben Folds are among the clients of Jacobs Music.

But Jacobs isn't just a piano retailer whose motto is "the finest pianos in every price range." It's one of the largest piano retailers in the country, with this area's largest selection of fine acoustic, digital and player pianos.

Jacobs is also a Steinway dealer and that's something to boast about. Over 96 percent of concert pianists choose to perform exclusively on Steinway pianos. Steinway & Sons selected Jacobs Music as its only dealer in Southeastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, representing new and authentic Steinway factory-restored heirloom pianos; the restoration of Steinways is done exclusively at the Steinway factory. Steinway & Sons does not sell its soundboards to outside rebuilders. A Steinway grand without a Steinway soundboard — the heart of the piano — doesn't sound and last like a Steinway. Steinway-designed pianos include Steinway & Sons, Boston and Essex instruments.

Jacobs is also one of the nation's leading suppliers of Yamaha acoustic, Disklavier player pianos and Clavinova digital pianos.

While it's one thing to be busy providing and preparing pianos for concert pianists, performing repairs and tuning for the area's major music venues and private clients (Jacobs' technical and restoration staff is Steinway factory-trained), it's another to be one of a kind.

Big on promoting appreciation of the arts in the Philadelphia and tristate area, Jacobs plays a leading role in the region's musical community, supporting schools and individuals in musical performance and education, sponsoring concerts, master classes, young artist competitions, teaching and technical seminars and other events. Annually, over 200 piano educators with thousands of students hold recitals at one of Jacobs' six locations. The company also presents the Jacobs Music Award to outstanding graduating pianists at area universities and music schools.

Neighborhood outreach includes sponsoring a night of opera — the Philadelphia Orchestra’s free concert featuring opera selections — at Capitolo Playground in South Philly. The concert had once been scrapped due to funding having been pulled, but was restored when Jacobs Music offered its financial support. Sponsorship for the \$85,000 price tag was in flux, but three groups chipped in to keep the concert alive.

Jacobs Music also raised \$75,000 to help promote global peace and raise funds for children in need through UNICEF by hosting the Steinway & Sons’ “Peace Piano,” Mark Love, Jacobs’ senior vice president for development & institutional sales said.

Having become a corporate partner of the Hope for Henry Foundation, Jacobs donated a Yamaha Clavinova digital piano to Georgetown University Hospital’s, Lombardi Cancer Center’s pediatric clinic in Washington, D.C., and to the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. Just recently, donations were made to the Ronald McDonald Houses, located at St. Christopher’s Hospital and the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. Jacobs also sponsor “Keys For Kids” concerts and “Perform-a-thons” to raise funds to benefit Hope for Henry Foundation.

Jacobs also considers sales to be a top priority. How do you gift wrap a piano? Ask Jacobs Music. Jacobs helps to educate consumers, so consumers won’t be misled into believing they’re acquiring a better piano than they’re actually purchasing. Consumers can also trust that they won’t acquire a “stencil piano” by mistake, or a generic instrument whose manufacturer has acquired respected names of past piano makers and “stenciled” them onto instruments that bear no resemblance to the quality or design of the original manufacturers.

Jacobs Music is operated by the Rinaldi family: Al C. Rinaldi, Gabrielle Kazze Rinaldi, Chris Rinaldi and Robert Rinaldi.

Jacobs Music Company was founded by the Jacobs family in 1900; they built the Chestnut Street building in 1937. At one point, when Jacobs Brothers had sold the business to American Music, a piano business from Detroit that later sold to Sherman Clay, Calif.-based owner of one of the largest piano retailers in the country, who did away with the Jacobs (the brand had great strength in Philadelphia. Al Rinaldi purchased the company in 1976, and “found the Jacobs sign in the basement and put it right up on the front of the building” said his wife, Gabrielle Kazze Rinaldi, daughter of the late Dr. Louis Kazze, pianist and educator and his wife, Lydia. In 1980, Mr. Rinaldi purchased the building from the Jacobs family. Before Jacobs, Al Rinaldi ran the piano departments at iconic major American department stores in Philadelphia: Wanamakers, Gimbels and Strawbridge & Clothier; representing Yamaha and other piano manufacturers.

For more information, visit www.jacobsmusic.com.

D.J. Boris can be contacted at djbmedia@yahoo.com.

Copyright © 2009 - The Bulletin

[x] Close Window