



# 2 Pianos 4 Hands

*By Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt  
Produced by Marquis Entertainment*



**“A shining '2 Pianos 4 Hands' is about the rigors of mastering the instrument, but it's for anyone with a dream.”**

*The Los Angeles Times (Jan 2006)*

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Winner of the 2006 Connecticut Critics' Circle Award for Outstanding Touring Production, the Marquis Entertainment production of **2 Pianos 4 Hands** has played to packed houses and critical acclaim across the US and Canada at first class theatres such as Laguna Playhouse, Hartford Stage, the Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Arizona Theatre Company and the Elgin Theatre in Toronto as part of Mirvish Productions' subscription season.

**2 Pianos 4 Hands** has had over 150 productions worldwide since its humble premiere in Toronto in 1996.

**"This joyful, playful and invigorating piece is precisely what our summer audiences love -- great music, great performances. It draws in audiences from all walks of life; from people of 8 to 84. It was such a crowd-pleaser last year, that we were thrilled to welcome it back to Hartford Stage this summer."**

*Michael Wilson (on 2 Pianos 4 Hands)  
Artistic Director, Hartford Stage*

**"It's hard to believe that anyone involved in theatre hasn't already heard of 2 Pianos 4 Hands, as it's already been a hit from coast to coast. Like our peers, we had great success with this show, from the professionalism and thoroughness of Marquis Entertainment to the tour-de-force performances, enthusiastic audiences and strong box office. It's a must for any community that hasn't already experienced it."**

*Richard Stein  
Executive Director, The Laguna Playhouse*

**“Vigorous and amusing, the show has been performed around the world, in dozens upon dozens of cities, but it's been surprisingly little-seen in the Los Angeles area. How gratifying, then, to see it programmed into the Laguna Playhouse season, in a ready-made Marquis Entertainment production that gleams like the polish on a grand piano.”**

*The Los Angeles Times (review of the Marquis Entertainment production of 2 Pianos 4 Hands, January 2006)*

official website [www.2pianos4hands.com](http://www.2pianos4hands.com)



## Production History Facts

- Ran for 6 months Off Broadway at The Promenade and The Variety Arts Theatre
- 4 completely sold out productions in Toronto that have played to 150,000+ people (Tarragon – 5 weeks in '96, Tarragon – 5 weeks in '97 , Royal Alex – 6 weeks in '98, Elgin Theatre – 4 weeks in '03)
- Sold Out 12 city tour coast to coast across Canada from May 1996 - Oct 1997
- 2003 - ranked by *American Theatre Magazine* as one of the Top 10 Most Produced Plays in the USA
- 2006 – Marquis Entertainment's production won the award for **Outstanding Touring Production** by the Connecticut Theatre Critics Circle (winning over Broadway touring productions of *The Lion King* and *Wicked*)
- Featured in many **Top 10 Productions of the Year** lists, including *The New York Post* (Clive Barnes, 1997)
- 1996 - won Toronto's Dora Award for **Outstanding Production** and a Chalmers Award (Canadian National Award) for **Playwriting**
- Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt have personally played 750+ performances (of the show's total 2,500)
- 5 Weeks at the Kennedy Arts Centre in Washington in '98, 10 Weeks in London's West End in '99, and 3 Weeks in Tokyo in '04
- Has played in over 150 cities worldwide
- Arguably the most successful play in the history of Canadian Theatre
- **Played to over 2 million people**

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**“Their show is more than a routine, it’s a dramatic gem. *2 Pianos 4 Hands* is funny, clever, insightful and touching, full of music, humour, story and character.”**  
*Globe and Mail*

**“Not a sour note. Not a lost chord. Not a misplaced phrase.”**  
*Toronto Star*



## Synopsis

**2 Pianos 4 Hands** is the riotous tale of two boys in Canada, Ted and Richard, sharing the same goal: concert pianist stardom. They work fervently towards their dream amidst pushy parents, eccentric teachers, hours of repetitive practice, stage fright, the agony of competitions and the dream of greatness.

Two actors, two pianos and many, many characters grace the stage as fifteen years of learning the art of piano playing unfolds. From classical to pops to jazz, the play provides the chance for two performers to give their all in a 120-minute virtuoso performance. Along the journey the actors/pianists portray a dazzling range of characters embellished with a show of piano wizardry featuring the music of Bach, Beethoven and Jerry Lee Lewis.

In the beginning, the actors take turns playing child versions of each character while the other assumes the role of the teacher, the adjudicator, the parent. As "friendly" competitors nearing their teens they face off at various festivals – experiencing stage fright and the dread of losing to eight year old prodigies. And as young adults, their eyes open to new ideas and influences. Seamlessly, their piano playing and perspectives on the world evolves. From *The Birch Canoe* they move to auditioning for Conservatories, playing the music of classical and jazz masters, facing conflicts with their parents, and sometimes thinking about the opposite sex...

...And as they mature, Ted and Richard become more aware of the gap between the very good and the great, and come to the humbling realization that greatness may be out of reach. And there lies the universal plight of all those with an ounce of training and talent and the will to "be" a professional musician, or athlete, or actor, or dancer.

**2 Pianos, 4 Hands** captures the humour that comes with learning to play the piano, and the sense of loss of eventually learning to let go of the dream.



## Production History

In 1994, Ted and Richard formed Talking Fingers, and under this company name first workshopped **2 Pianos 4 Hands** at the Tarragon, with generous support from the Ontario Arts Council. Tarragon Theatre subsequently programmed the show as part of its 1995/1996 season, where it garnered rave reviews, played a sold-out run, received the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Production and the prestigious Chalmers Award. Tarragon Theatre then toured the production nationally from May 1996 to September 1997.

In the fall of 1997, **2 Pianos 4 Hands** was presented Off Broadway at The Promenade Theatre by a team of producers: David and Ed Mirvish, Ben Sprecher and William P. Miller. The production was widely acclaimed, and ran for 6 months before transferring to the Kennedy Centre in Washington (both productions featured Dykstra and Greenblatt). **2 Pianos 4 Hands** has since played to sold-out houses at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto and at the Comedy Theatre in the West End of London.

In the fall of 2003, Ted and Richard reunited to perform in the greatly anticipated Toronto revival at the majestic Elgin Theatre, again playing to sold-out houses and spectacular reviews. And in the spring of 2004, Ted and Richard toured to Tokyo, Japan where they played for three weeks at Le Theatre Ginza, presented by Japan's largest theatre company, Shochiku.

In 2006, Marquis Entertainment's production of **2 Pianos 4 Hands**, featuring Richard Carsey and Tom Frey, was awarded the 2006 Connecticut Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Touring Production (winning over Broadway touring productions of *The Lion King* and *Wicked*).

Since its humble Toronto premiere, **2 Pianos 4 Hands** has had 5000+ performances at more than 150 different theatres throughout North America, Europe, Asia (Japan and Hong Kong), Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, playing to more than 2 million people worldwide.



## The Creators

**Ted Dykstra** has received Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations as an actor, director, writer, producer and composer, and was awarded Doras for *Fire* (Acting) and *2 Pianos 4 Hands* (producing), as well as a Chalmers Award for writing (*2P4H*). Co-writer of *2P4H*, he has performed it in 11 Canadian cities (including 4 Toronto runs) as well as in New York, Washington DC, London's West End and Tokyo, Japan. He has also directed productions of *2P4H* across the US, as well as in Australia and Hong Kong.

He has played leading roles on every major stage in Canada, including three years of leading roles at the Shaw Festival and three years of leading roles at the Stratford Festival. Some of his favourite memories are the title roles in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *Hamlet* and *Amadeus*, Cousin Kevin in *The Who's Tommy* (Dora nomination), Daffyd Llewellyn in *A Chorus of Disapproval* (Dora Nomination), Bottom in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Ariel in *The Tempest*. He has acted in dozens of movies and television shows, and just received a Gemini Award for his performance in *Shattered City: The Halifax Explosion*. He has composed music for theatres across the country.

He is a founding member of Toronto's Soulpepper Theatre, where he has directed several productions, including *Fool for Love*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Beggar's Opera*, and *Leaving Home*. He has directed numerous other productions in Toronto including *Aladdin* (Dora nomination), *Snow White and the Group of Seven*, *Tequila Vampire Matinee* (Dora Nomination), *Science Fiction*, *Scott Thompson's Lowest Show on Earth*, and *BULLY*. Last year, he directed *Anne Frank* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* for the Neptune Theatre in Halifax. Upcoming, he will be directing *Little Shop of Horrors* for Canstage. Ted also wrote and directed *Mordecai Richler: A Celebration* for the CBC and is currently writing a musical commissioned by David Mirvish.

He is the proud husband of Juno Award winning singer Melanie Doane, and ecstatic father of their two children, Theo and Rosie.

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**Richard Greenblatt** was born in Montreal and started taking piano lessons with Dorothy Morton at the age of seven. He studied acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, England. Since his return to Canada in 1975, he has been acting, directing, writing and composing music for theatre, radio, television and film across the country and abroad. He has played leading roles in regional theatres (The Fool in *King Lear*, the title role in *Spinoza*, amongst many others) and in Toronto (George in *Possible Worlds*, Creon in *Antigone*, Sam Baum in *Adam Baum and the Jew Movie*, etc.). He has appeared in feature films (*Stardom*, *Shadow Dancing*, etc.) and has played numerous roles on television. He has performed *2 Pianos 4 Hands* with Ted Dykstra over 750 times, including 6 months at The Promenade in New York City, ten weeks on the West End in London, and three weeks in Tokyo.

He has directed over 80 productions for the stage, the vast majority being original works, and has been a co-writer on some of the most successful new plays in recent Canadian theatre history including *The Theory of Relatives*; *i.d.*; and *Sibs*, which was also made into a CBC movie. Most recently, he has performed in a new collaboration with Diane Flacks entitled *Care* (Tarragon Theatre), performed his one-man play *Letters from Lehrer* (CanStage), featuring the work of song satirist Tom Lehrer, and directed both *Danny - King of the Basement* and *Wrecked* for Roseneath Theatre. He has won four Dora Awards and two Chalmers Awards as well as receiving numerous other nominations. He has taught both acting and directing at most of the theatre training institutions in Canada.



## The Producers

### Marquis Entertainment Inc. (Producer/Agent)

**Marquis Entertainment** has established itself as a leader in the international theatre industry. In 1996, Robert Richardson identified an opportunity to develop a company with a focus on producing and managing productions for both national and international markets such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, South Africa, France, Germany, Norway, Finland, and South America.

Marquis Entertainment currently represents the authors of *2 Pianos, 4 Hands* and *Mom's the Word* – both produced in the West End of London and *2 Pianos, 4 Hands* also produced Off-Broadway. Marquis also represents the authors of *Mom's the Word 2 – Unhinged*, *Anne & Gilbert*, *Da Kink in My Hair*, *A Closer Walk with Patsy Cline*, *Hockey Mom Hockey Dad* and *Sibs*.

Select Theatrical Producing Credits include: *2 Pianos, 4 Hands* in Toronto, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Australia, throughout the USA and Canada; *Adventures of A Black Girl in Search of God* (w/ Mirvish Productions); *A Couple of Blaguards* (w/ Mirvish Productions); *Hockey Mom Hockey Dad* (Canadian Tour); *Fully Committed* (with Arts Club Theatre, Vancouver); and an Ontario tour of *Sibs*.

Select General Management credits include: Ross Petty's *Aladdin* (Toronto / Canadian Tour with Live Nation Canada); *The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead* (Stratford Festival); *The Rat Pack* (Mirvish Productions); and *Fully Committed* with Mark McKinney (Just For Laughs Festival). Upcoming, Marquis will be General Manager of the North American premiere of the new Irish musical *Ha'Penny Bridge* for Mirvish Productions; Ross Petty's *Peter Pan* (Toronto Elgin Theatre) and the Canadian tour of *The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead*.

Select Film & TV Producing credits include: *Santa Baby* (Best Comedy winner at the LA Short Film Festival); *A Tribute to Brian Linehan* (City TV / Toronto Int'l Film Festival); and *Mordecai Richler: A Celebration* starring Richard Dreyfuss (CBC Television).

**Marquis Entertainment** is also delighted to be the Artistic Producer of the Jackson-Triggs Estate Winery's Amphitheatre since its opening in 2002 – a five hundred seat open air theatre in the heart of Niagara-on-the-Lake, featuring such Guest Artists as Steven Page (of Barenaked Ladies), Chantal Kreviazuk, Paul Brandt, Matt Dusk, Jim Cuddy (of Blue Rodeo), Sarah Harmer, and Jesse Cook.

For more information on the company, please visit [www.marquisent.ca](http://www.marquisent.ca).

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## Review Highlights

### **NEW YORK POST**

**Anyone who has ever taken a piano lesson, or, much more significant, ever simply encountered some kind of career or life disappointment and moved on, can identify with their story, chuckle and have a great time. The show delights on two levels - you might empathize on both or merely on one. It doesn't matter. It should hit you on the ironic funny bone of self-identification.**

Level one is the piano-study bit. This is the semi-autobiographical story of two guys, who both wanted to be classical concert pianists and had conservatory training. They take us thorough all their various lessons, parents, exams and trials. Anyone who has faced a blank piano keyboard and listened, at any level, to the exhortations of piano teachers will recall the agony, or at best the pleasure/pain. Now, they are both fine pianists. If I could play as well as that I would think of myself more as Arthur Rubenstein than Victor Borge. Mind you, if I could play as well as Victor Borge I would think myself more as Arthur Rubenstein than Victor Borge.

This is the point. Here is the second and more poetic level of empathy. However good Dykstra and Greenblatt are - and listening to them play pieces from Bach back to Billy Joel one soon picks up that they are by our level extraordinarily good - they still have to learn that they are not good enough. They drop out. They fail.

These funny, funny actors, fine natural comedians, unobtrusively helped by Gloria Muzio's staging, are clever, deft and dazzlingly amusing but would not have made even flamboyantly mediocre concert artists. And it doesn't matter. They are triumphant in what they do. Disappointment is shoved into the closet, as we and they join in the recognition of their fulfillment. And we remember that many of us can enjoy jogging without winning an Olympic marathon. It's nice, even comforting subtext.

- Clive Barnes, *New York Post*

### **VARIETY**

**While many of the pieces are played seriously, the show is anything but; take-offs, pastiches and routines in the style of Liberace and Borge abound, as do hilarious one-liners. After all, this is primarily a piece of theatre, and what it offers is a razor-sharp insight into the world of training and competition.**

Even those who are tone-deaf and have never handled a musical instrument will enjoy flying up and down the various dramatic and musical scales. And despite the personal storyline, the play's theme resonates clearly beyond the arts into other world – wherever winning and sacrifice are the order of the day.

Some sections actually verge on standup comedy, but this does not prevent the two actors from also carrying a few deeply affecting moments. One scene in particular, where Dykstra auditions for Canada's top music school only to be contemptuously dismissed as supremely talented but undisciplined, is devastating.

The mix of genres and styles is never confusing or distracting in a script carefully structured to stay on track with a simplicity that renders the final result engaging and popular, without being cheaply sentimental or lazy. *2 Pianos 4 Hands* is destined to travel far, not only across Canada, but also within international cultural circles.

- Mira Friedlander, *Variety*



**The four hands sprout from two Canadians, Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt, each of whom abandoned a prospective career as a pianist for one as an actor. This is their story, and an enormously enjoyable one it is.**

...Dykstra and Greenblatt perform not only their own child, adolescent and adult selves, but teachers desperately trying to explain what rhythm is and parents threatening loss of pocket money for lack of proper practice... Both performers have the comic skill to give us characters sulky, exasperated or scathing, and the musical skill to tackle some moderately taxing pieces.

...The production isn't only amusing and pleasing to the ear. There's sadness here too. Late in the play they get high on beer and listen to a record of Horowitz performing Liszt in Carnegie Hall. "If you're not going to play like that, what's the point?" asks one, and the other has no answer. Most of us are doomed to be alpha-minus or beta-plus at best, and our punishment is to know it.

- *The Times*



**An Off-Broadway hit, this semi-autobiographical piece is created and performed by two engaging Canadians, Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt, a cross between the Labeque sisters and a more sophisticated version of Reeves & Mortimer. Put either of these actors in a play and you could entirely avoid that awful moment where a character retreats to the other side of the piano and mimes kneading bread on an instrument that appears to be throwing its voice to the wings. These guys can act and give those ivories a good seeing-to, and then some.**

The point, though, is that their intensive adolescent training resulted in the realisation, around the age of 17 that a career as a soloist was not in the cards. From the first faltering lessons through to the boozy rueful retrospection of adulthood, the show traces a would-be prodigy's progress. *2 Pianos 4 Hands* is staged with a nice wit and a pleasing clarity. Two Steinways in jigsaw-fit stand...a tall translucent surround allows the performers to go off and create, say, the giant silhouettes of over-demanding parents. In a lovely droll touch that's like truancy a deux, Dykstra and Greenblatt take it in turns to keep a Mozart sonata going while the other nine-year-old self repeatedly skives off...

...I blushed with recognition at the [parental] blackmailing techniques. Their subtext is often: "Just think what I could have achieved, if I'd been as lucky as you and had me as a father." It's a no-win situation for both child and parents. As we see here, there will be regrets and recriminations either way, not to mention the Schadenfreude of the eventual teacher (and failed practitioner) who tells you that you've misused your talents and aren't good enough.

Keeping their audience tantalised to the end, Dykstra and Greenblatt finished with some mesmerising Bach. A damn fine way to treat two Steinways.

- *The Independent*



**A shining '2 Pianos 4 Hands' is about the rigors of mastering the instrument, but it's for anyone with a dream.**

... Vigorous and amusing... a ready-made Marquis Entertainment production that gleams like the polish on a grand piano.

... For the audience, this shared experience is like joining the aspiring dancers of "A Chorus Line" or the young spellers of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." But more essentially, it resonates with anyone who's ever had a dream.

... Tom Frey portrays Ted, and Richard Carsey is Richard. Both men have performed the show extensively, and they masterfully hit the story's beats, under Greenblatt's direction.

**-Daryl H. Miller, *Los Angeles Times***



**2 Pianos 4 Hands** the two-actor musical entertainment that was a sensation in Canada and is now blossoming in American regional theatres, begins performances Feb. 5 at Actors Theatre of Louisville.

**The musically eclectic production, about two pianists and the stories behind their lifelong obsession with the instrument, is not simple to cast or develop since musicianship and personality are keys to the experience, so ATL has booked the Marquis Entertainment production of the work by Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt.**

The original creators help maintain international productions of the show; Greenblatt directs the Marquis-Louisville staging that pairs pianists Richard Carsey (as Richard) and Tom Frey (as Ted) for the first time. Each actor-pianist has played the show elsewhere.

... This production "is a hilarious and heartwarming story performed by two gifted actor musicians who portray a bevy of characters, from the aspiring musicians themselves to eccentric teachers, proud parents, fierce competitors and brutally honest adjudicators. And all the while they're tickling the ivories, offering up everything from Bach and Beethoven to Billy Joel's 'Piano Man.'"

Actor-pianist Frey previously played Richard in productions around the country and understudied Dykstra in the most recent Toronto run. Carsey played Richard in the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre run of the show. Carsey is the artistic director of Skylight Opera Theatre in Milwaukee. In the fall, he relinquishes that position to pursue acting, performing and conducting projects, while maintaining the role of principal conductor at Skylight.

**- Kenneth Jones, *Playbill***



**Be glad Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt suffered tormented childhoods. Be thankful, in fact. Because if they hadn't, odds are 2 Pianos 4 Hands their hilarious show that just opened at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater, might never have happened.**

Based on their experiences as once-promising piano students, the evening is a remembrance of awful things past – vignettes of crazed instructors, obsessed parents, torturous recitals and other high points of musical training. Resentful at first, the boys eventually take their playing seriously, each envisioning himself one day taking his place alongside Mozart, Beethoven and Horowitz. Just when they think they're looking at a brilliant future, the brutal demands of art and competition slap them into realizing that the best either of them could ever hope to be is the best piano player in the neighborhood. Maybe.

But Dykstra and Greenblatt, who wrote the piece, are more interested in showing that you don't have to be sentimental or superhuman to survive a failed dream. By acknowledging the bitter sadness that will always linger, *2 Pianos 4 Hands* avoids turning into a gooey homily on the need to accept one's limitations. The show's liveliness and strength derive from the duo's ability to look back not in anger but affection, not with nostalgia but clarity. They zero in on the weird mix of absurdity and logic that always seems to develop whenever kids are forced to assume artistic ambition. The result is a little more than two hours of big laughs – not just at the eccentric and dysfunctional people who terrorized their youth but at themselves as well.

Don't be surprised, though, if between the guffaws you feel a stab of recognition.

- **William Triplett**, *The Washington Post*

## » TORONTO STAR «

**Not a sour note. Not a lost chord. Not a misplaced phrase. That might be a way to start a commentary on a music recital, but it works even better for the inspired show that opened last night.**

With constant howls of delighted audience recognition, all of whom clearly seem to have suffered the agonies of piano lessons and piano teachers, the presentation of *2 Pianos 4 Hands* sets a new mark for polished performance and slick comedy in a current theatrical season that has been distinguished by very few laughathons.

The collaboration between Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt is an unlikely but delightful stirring together of the theatrical and musical worlds, comic scenes connected by music drawn from a huge variety of styles. Along the way they reprise the horrors of practice, imitate the martinets and maniacs who insist on pianistic perfection, play roles as adjudicators and examiners and music school chiefs, and generate a chuckle a minute while so doing.

Learning to play piano is represented as an overture to growing up. The crafty vignettes highlight the inevitable clashes with parental authority, the rigorous demands if a professional career is contemplated, and the difficulty of maintaining self-motivation. When maturity takes over, there's a different kind of enthusiasm and conviction and some awareness of reality.

At first it seemed that a mere extended skit in the manner of Victor Borge was on the cards as the actors kidded around while preparing to play two huge conservatory grand pianos. But then, with narrative zip, visual wit a sense of scale and some fascinating dramatic rhythms, the pair created a hilarious compendium of incidents in the life of those who try - and ultimately fail - to play the instrument well.

- **Geoff Chapman**, *The Toronto Star*

## GLOBEANDMAIL

**Comedy at the piano is a small category and the names of past winners may make you groan. There's Victor Borge. Remember Liberace? Now add Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt to the list and throw out all your preconceptions. Neither camp nor corny, their show is much more than a routine, it's a dramatic gem. 2 Pianos 4 Hands is funny, clever, insightful and touching, full of music, humour, story and character.**

...But it is in the midst of a scene between Richard and his interfering father that you realize Greenblatt and Dykstra are not kidding around. The tidy little scene gently and poignantly summarizes the way in which the father's lost musical ambitions are being lived out in the child's practice sessions. There are musical jokes here, to be sure, but there's also a powerful moment of genuine human drama. From there, *2 Pianos 4 Hands* never looks back. It follows Ted and Richard as they grow from prodigies in the under-12 category to awkward teen-agers experimenting with girls and jazz, skillfully weaving a little music and a lot of laughs into the story. Greenblatt and Dykstra create a whole series of characters without ever changing out of their tuxedos, simply relying on voice,

mannerism and posture. They are particularly good at capturing the sheepish looks and slumped backs of recalcitrant children, and their briefer characterizations of various competing music teachers, each one sinking the knife into his predecessor's work, are hilarious.

Because Greenblatt and Dykstra so carefully establish these subtle nuances of tone in the first half they can become magnificently serious in the second half. There, as Richard and Ted discover they are not good enough to become concert pianists, *2 Pianos 4 Hands* takes a gentle look at musical obsession and broken dreams. Before they leave us with a joyous rendition of the first movement of Bach's D Minor Piano Concerto, Richard and Ted agree they are not the best pianists in the world. Nor, they sadly realize, are they the best pianists in the country or the city. But for sure they are the best pianists in the neighbourhood. And as comedians at the piano – well, they've reinvented the genre.

- Kate Taylor, *The Globe and Mail*



**THE PIANOS** are the real thing. The two glorious Yamaha concert grands at the Geary Theater for ACT's production of *2 Pianos 4 Hands* are so long their sleek, gleaming, black bodies placed not quite end-to-end stretch almost all the way across the stage.

**The four hands** are the real thing, too. Though they're not the hands that created the show and have been principally responsible for its widespread success. The fingers of Gregory Charles and Jean Marchand fly over the keyboards in brightly phrased bits - some short, some long - of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart; Schumann and Schubert; Grieg, Rachmaninoff and Chopin; Richard Rodgers, Vince Guaraldi, John Lennon and Billy Joel.

Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt's semi-autobiographical concert-play, about the perils and pitfalls of studying to become professional musicians and not quite making it, looks as if it's, well . . . in good hands. They've created spinoff companies, allowing them the freedom to resume their regular stage, film and TV careers. Marchand and Charles opened in the French Canadian version, *Deux Pianos Quatre Mains*, in Montreal two years ago (the ACT production is their English-language debut with the show), and another version - with two women - is touring the States. Dykstra, who directed ACT's production, is heading for Australia to stage it yet again.

...The pleasures conveyed by many of their own renditions, including the four-handed Bach that closes [are] convincing of the worth of musicianship that's less than virtuosic. Stick around for the encore.

- Robert Hurwitt, *The Examiner*

## Star-Telegram

**Pianist-actors strike just the right chord.**

...Actors/pianists Richard Carsey and Tom Frey maintain a tight rhythm of comic timing and musical ensemble. And this production hits high notes, which musicians and non-musicians alike should find funny and affecting.

...Both actors impersonate a full gamut of oddball teachers, pushy parents and other colorful personalities. Carsey's soft, malleable face admits the slightest gesture, while Frey demonstrates a gift for vocal inflection. But lest there be any doubt, these are actors with solid piano chops.

- Matthew Erikson, *Star-Telegram*

## The Sydney Morning Herald

**2 Pianos 4 Hands** is a splendid example of how elegance and radiant energy combine with unobtrusive technique to create rewarding entertainment. Dykstra and Greenblatt are played (represented might be a better word) by Edward Simpson and Jonathan Gavin who, with great good humour, expertise and musical fluency, illuminate the trials and tribulations of talented youngsters as they progress into adolescence and mature into well-credentialed performers.

This journey entails hectoring parents, tantrums, music teachers and mentors of every hue, competitions, examinations, searching evaluations of theory and technique and the constant flux of confidence at odds with doubt. It's an engaging experience, propelled by artful characterisations and lovely melodies from the classic repertoire - sheared across now and then by the discord of rebellion, self-doubt, crushing defeat and the temptations inherent in pop, rock and jazz.

Simpson and Gavin reveal a sure sense of comic timing, deft phrasing, intonation and pace to match their mastery of such skills at the keyboard.

Just as, say, *Once A Catholic* and *Mum's The Word* held enormous appeal for those with the relevant experiences in schooling and childbirth, this production is bound to strike a beguiling chord with anyone who has ever undertaken piano lessons ... not to mention singing, dance or acting. But its appeal extends well beyond that domain. It's the stuff of life.

Dykstra and Greenblatt's duet eventually subsides into an "I could'a been a contender" commiseration when their dreams founder but the spirit that propels their journey and the warmth of Simpson and Gavin in reliving it make **2 Pianos 4 Hands** a night to savour.

- Doug Anderson, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

## Mainichi NEWSPAPERS

...There is an opportunity to taste the atmosphere of New York while you are in Tokyo.

...After attending **2 Pianos 4 Hands** at Le Theatre Ginza I felt like I had just taken a day trip to Broadway. How happy I was to have been able to see the production that ran for 6 months Off-Broadway with the original cast. On leaving the theatre, I deeply regretted not having honoured the production with a standing ovation, knowing as a performer myself that that kind of response is the strongest way an audience can truly show their appreciation for great performers.

...It has a very simple stage set – just two Grand Pianos. The playing and acting of the two performances is absolute excellence. I felt a touch of jealousy to know that God can bless people as talented geniuses in not only one area, but two...The two performers are superb.

...This is a show that I would really recommend if you do have the time and money...no, even if you have to borrow money, or if you have to take a day off from work, or even if you have become ill you really must see it.

I'm a little angry at myself for not being able to properly express my enthusiasm any more succinctly. Now that I reread my column, it feels a little one-note. I guess what I want to say is that the show was wonderful beyond words. I can write anything, but it will never express what they do on stage.

I just wish and pray that everyone will be able to get a ticket.

- Shinosuke Tachikawa, *The Mainichi Newspaper* (Translated by Miyoko Ito)

## DAILY YOMIURI

...The latter half of the play contains more heartfelt scenes that explore the difficult reality of serious musical study. The teenagers hit the wall of talent and learn how difficult it is to realize their dreams of becoming professionals. So while the play begins as a straight comedy, it evolves into something more real and sad - this play is the epitome of life's reality.

The basic storyline is very simple to follow, sometimes it may even seem too easy, but with the addition of the two pianos the play is infused with depth and a sense of poetry.

In the final scene, the two boys who are both now over 40, listen in awe to a CD of a Horowitz recording. They sit at their pianos, and say to each other: "We're not bad piano players at all."

As they play the Bach D Minor you sense the warmth they now feel towards life and their deep affection for classical music. The ideas of this mature play resonate long after the curtain closes.

- **Tanaka Satoshi**, *The Daily Yomiuri* (Translated by Miyoko Ito)

## The Citizen

Johannesburg

...All the roles, or course, are expertly played by Cronje and Feather, who switch from pranks to spansks with consummate ease.

Petulant brats who'd rather be playing cricket or watching Star Trek – and later, obsessing about girls – are rapidly transformed into cocky young men with virtually no social life outside those inanimate heaps of keys. Their love-hate relationship with the piano is probed with much insight. Themes of parental pressure, personal goals and rejection are humourously explored, while the pair cleverly and expertly weaves contemporary and classical music pieces into the dramatic equation. At the end, as two middle-aged men reflecting on their failed musical careers while getting merrily sloshed, they philosophize about what went wrong and decide that ambition be damned – do something for the love and fun of it!

This is where the actors' true skill as pianists is demonstrated, banging out an exhilarating piece that had the audience on its feet for several curtain calls.

*2 Pianos 4 Hands* is anything but a dull piano recital – this classical blast from the past is a hoot!

- **Christina Kennedy**, *The Citizen*

## Hartford Courant.

'*2 Pianos 4 Hands*' Actors Show Great Range.

...the two-man show...adds up to a performance of many colors. Richard Carsey and Tom Frey, its dueling keyboardists, come across as true renaissance men, masters of low comedy as well as digital dynamics. The musical drama by Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt opens up a world that is at once familiar and Olympian. Learning an instrument seems difficult enough, but over the course of the play, a more painful moral emerges. Mastering the piano proves a sheer impossibility for most mortals, however talented.

... Directed with wit, variety and growing poignancy by Greenblatt.

-**Malcolm Johnson**, *Hartford Courant*

**courier-journal.com**  
The Courier-Journal Louisville, Kentucky

**The performances of Richard Carsey and Tom Frey in *2 Pianos 4 Hands* at Louisville Actors' Theatre are as polished as the matching pair of Steinways they play at center stage.**

In this highly amusing show, the accomplished musicians also prove to be versatile actors as they enact the stories of two gifted young pianists who eventually learn the painful truth of their limitations in a competitive world that demands obsessive practice and a brush of genius.

*2 Pianos 4 Hands* recounts the familiar agonies of early piano lessons, the experience of being a teenage music nerd, the competitiveness between serious young musicians and the clashes with

teachers and parents as a child prodigy grows up. Carsey and Frey are such well-trained musicians they probably had to practice making mistakes so that Richard and Ted would appear as believable piano students.

Although the show is a series of vignettes, it's neither disjointed nor a mere assortment of satirical jabs at the classical world. The music is played seriously and well. The story is witty and has moments of touching drama, notably when Ted auditions for Canada's Conservatory of Music only to be told that he's exceedingly talented but too lazy and undisciplined to make it there. In a snappy, comic scene as entertaining as the piano duets, the two actors volley in a quick-recall test involving the names of famous composers and the definitions of music terms, ranging from *adagio* to *tranquillemente*.

From "Chopsticks" and "Heart and Soul" to classical works by Bach (D Minor Concerto) and Beethoven (Pathétique Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, 1st and 2nd Movements), with some Billy Joel ("Piano Man") and Jerry Lee Lewis ("Great Balls of Fire") thrown in for good measure, the show is a delightful two hours that will make you laugh in recognition and sigh in sympathy for its young pianists.

Whether or not you have ever taken a music lesson or faced a public recital, everyone at times faces fear of failure and the possibility of subsequent humiliation. With humor and music, **2 Pianos 4 Hands** tells us that striving for a dream is important and there is consolation and joy in doing what one loves, even if you don't become the best in the world.

- **Judith Egerton**, *The Courier Journal*



**...In ATC's production, the fleet fingers belong to Mark Anders (playing a character called Ted) and Carl J. Danielsen (as Rich). The greatest challenge facing Anders and Danielsen is not merely portraying two boys who age from about 8 to 19, nor filling in as a host of adults—the cruel or ineffective teachers, parents who initially insist on long half-hours of practice but are later horrified when their boys talk about going pro. No, the greatest test of the actors' abilities is convincingly playing the piano badly. They are, after all, supposed to be children, struggling through scales, clunkily phrasing one bar at a time, and eventually developing enough facility to confuse speed with expression. Add to this a couple of physical routines worthy of Victor Borge, and pianistic ineptitude has never been so entertaining.**

...But then reality sets in, and, through an engaging piano—nerd rivalry, teens Ted and Rich must grapple more seriously with the likes of Chopin and Schubert, not to mention antagonistic professors at the local conservatory. Dykstra and Greeblatt abandoned the piano when they hit 17, and it will give away no surprise to reveal that characters Ted and Rich do likewise. Most of us do, after all, much to our later chagrin. And **2 Pianos 4 Hands** is not so much about Ted and Rick as about all the rest of us.

...at the end of the play, it's difficult not to take heart when Ted and Rich, now in their late 30s, get together to drink beer and listen to a Vladimir Horowitz recording of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*.

Dismayed that they could never achieve a delicate effect that Horowitz produces so effortlessly, Ted and Rich nevertheless affirm that even if they're not the best pianists in the world, at least they're the best in the neighborhood. And when they sit down to play Bach together joyously, it's a beautiful day in the neighborhood.

- **James Reel**, *Tucson Weekly*

***2 Pianos 4 Hands* is an unusual import with a premise that sounds questionable: a play with music about musical pedagogy. The production is funny, touching and illuminating.**

Here's the story behind the play: Creators Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt, two Canadian actors, met by accident and discovered they both had been trained as classical pianists. Their shared stories resulted in a casual duo concert in which they performed favorite pieces including Bach's D Minor Concerto. Encouraged by its success, they developed a theatre piece incorporating stories about how they became accomplished pianists and why music drives, haunts and nourishes them.

Playing all the parts – student and teacher, son and father, etc. – the two guys toured Canada, and they played London and Off Broadway. The work's success spawned a new cast and an expanded tour of regional theatres.

Actor/musicians Carl Danielsen and Mark Anders bring the piece to life in Denver. On an elegant stage with one chandelier and Steinways, the men reenact the lives of two gifted musicians who struggle with youthful dreams, boring practice sessions, demanding parents, difficult teachers, quirky mentors, the high tension of a conservatory education and the cold slap of reality. ***2 Pianos 4 Hands*** is all about human aspiration. No matter what your vocation, this play will remind you of yours.

- Judith Reynolds, *The Durango Herald*