

MISS FLORA | PIANO



Toward the end of the twentieth century, a New York Steinway factory produced an exquisite 9-foot model D concert grand who came into the world feeling confident that she would, assisted by some of the world's finest musicians, play some of the world's greatest music during her lifetime. Fortunately, she was recruited immediately by Brandon University in Manitoba Canada where a most knowledgeable and attentive nanny and Steinway technician, Mark Cramer, had painstakingly readied her quarters in anticipation of her arrival.

Soon after she had settled in, Mark realized that she was an exceptional protégé and joined with others who were enthralled with her many charms and attributes and named her after the respected and beloved Canadian legislator who had proven such a good friend to the arts—Flora Isabel MacDonald.

In short order, Flora Isabel established herself as a prima donna in the department and stole the hearts of many visiting celebrity pianists including concert pianist and classical music critic Charles Rosen, who joined her for a memorable evening and then commemorated the occasion by signing her innards and speaking eloquently about the exceptional quality of her voice.

As luck would have it, during recent years Mark Cramer and Andrew Armstrong became good friends who greatly admired each other's devotion to classical music and skill with the piano. When the opportunity arose, Mark asked Andrew if he had the wherewithal to secure Isabel Flora as a permanent partner. With some trepidation--knowing full well that few small music venues can afford anything other than rental pianos, Andrew asked the Chamber Board if there were any possibility that she could become a resident artist of the USCB program. The very happy answer to his question was that Friends' habits formed over years of giving generously to both annual and endowment funding made the seemingly impossible, possible.

In July of 2022 Staci Breton began the arduous and sometimes painful process of inviting Miss Flora to sally south to the Carolina Lowcountry. Reams of paperwork and thousands of dollars later, Miss Flora was transported by her private 18-wheeler across the border and arrived at the Art Center loading dock in mid-October. She was greeted by Michael Johns, Jeff Herrin, and helpers. When she had her legs once more under her, she donned a Cramer-designed cover and special safety bumpers and retired to the temperature-and-humidity-controlled closet, which had been especially prepared for her arrival, to acclimate to her new environs until the first weekend in November.

After an extensive beauty parlor appointment on November 4, she was fully prepared to greet an exuberant and admiring Andy, who adjusted his new hydraulic piano bench, and instantly began playing Perry's "Prelude for Piano" while enthusiastically extoling Miss

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Flora's myriad virtues. As many of us were lucky enough to witness on Sunday, November 6, these two make magic together, and USCB Chamber Music now finds itself miraculously on a new plateau in the classical music world. No doubt when Andy greets his great, good friend James Ehnes early in the new year, he will still be in awe of James' amazing talent, but we suspect he will no longer bring the green-eyed monster envying James for his very fine Strad to the concert...he will simply smile smugly and ask Miss Flora for a few extra flourishes.

[Click here to watch Miss Flora's debut at the November 6th concert.](#)