

Evening Echo

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Home recitals re-energise world-famous pianist David

IT'S not often that fans are given a chance to see their favourite musicians up close and personal. But every summer in Ahabeg, near Castletownbere in west Cork, world renowned pianist David Syme invites people into his own home for recitals that are performed for five consecutive Sunday afternoons right in his very own living room.

The American pianist, who has recorded 25 concertos on 19 CDs with some of the world's best orchestras and who continues to sell out major venues year after year, had initially hoped to entice some of the locals during his summer hiatus in Ahabeg, a part of Ireland he has grown to love situated between Castletownbere and Adrigole.

"I started in 2007 and I really am overwhelmed at the response we have got, it's been amazing. People just kept showing up and as a performer used to big venues, I get such a buzz being so close to the audience and the atmosphere is truly amazing," he said.

David's modesty is surprising considering he has cemented his reputation as one of the world's best piano players. At 61 years of age, he has been touring professionally since his early twenties and after his summer stint in Cork, he is back on the road with performances scheduled in Budapest, Prague and Warsaw.

Having travelled the world many times over, he admits that the annual recitals in west Cork have given him a new lease of life as a musician, and such an intimate setting has led him to set the bar even higher than he normally would.

"On an international tour I would usually write my programme a year in advance and usually I know the pieces so well it just comes naturally to me. For the living room recitals, I tend to practice 6 hours a day.

"I can't stop practicing for a second because it will derail me. It is an amazing demand to set myself but when there are people driving five hours here and five hours home just to see me play, I feel I need to push myself a lot more," he said.



The recitals are held in David Syme's own living room at his house in Ahabeg near Castletownbere.

By EMMA POWER

Setting such high standards has certainly paid off. With just a few flyers and a chalk board on the road, David Syme has had fans driving all the way from Northern Ireland just to see him play and last year audience members included Christy Moore and Maureen O'Hara.

For five consecutive Sundays beginning on August 8, people who have reserved their place online make their way to the home of David Syme and his wife Suzanne.

Luckily the couple have a spacious enough living room to seat 50 people, but can push to a capacity of 75 if needs be.

"At 61 years old I have been lucky enough to do something I love and

make a decent living out of it but to have this renaissance of life is just thrilling for me. As a performer, the energy and the attitude of people

here is worth all the hours of practice," he said.

Born in Pennsylvania, David was just three when he could play songs by ear on the piano. With such a natural ability he refused to take any lessons until he was 12 and realised in order to make a career out of it he would have to train with the greats in order to become one of them.

A protégé of the legendary Jorge Bolet, he began playing Beethoven's *First Concerto* at 13 and even now the relentless practice never ends. But as

with everything in life he is testament to the fact that hard graft ultimately pays off.

"When I was in high school I would get up at 5am and practice all day. It was a very lonely life but I'm so grateful because by my early twenties I was getting to travel all over the world.

"Being a performer it is the type of job that thrives on ambition and dies without it, so setting myself new goals is monumental in what I do. For example Rachmaninoff's *Third Concerto* took me three or four years to learn, it was the hardest

thing for me to do but learning it gave me a massive sense of achievement and if I can please all the lovely people who come to see me play then that's enough for me," he said.

And for those who find their classical knowledge is a tad rusty, David assures me he includes some old favourites before his recital ends.

"I always include *Maggie* and of course *Danny Boy* always goes down a treat, and can you also let people know my wife makes the best desserts which are handed out during the interval, maybe that's what they've been coming back for all these years!" he added.

● *Summer 2010 Ahabeg* recitals begin on Sunday, August 8, at 3pm. Admission is €20. For more information log on to www.symepiano.com.

