



Crown Jewel

CATHY AND PETER HALSTEAD'S MODEST PROPOSAL:
A MOUNTAINTOP CONCERT VENUE THAT ONE DAY MIGHT BE
THE RED ROCKS OF MOZART FANS

ENTER “YETI PIANO” ON YOUTUBE’S SEARCH ENGINE, and you’ll run across a parody of a Coldplay music video that’s been watched some 2.5 million times. But first on the list of returns (despite a relatively paltry 200 views) is a six-minute documentary narrated by a piano tuner from Anchorage, in which a helicopter airlifts a 1,000-pound Steinway grand onto a mile-high snowy bench overlooking the Marcus Baker ice field. Then a pianist dressed like the Abominable Snowman plops onto a fake boulder in front of the keyboard and begins hammering out the rumbling opening strains of Richard Strauss’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, as spin-drift avalanches curl off of distant peaks.

“I could have filmed myself talking about music, but then I thought, ‘I should make it more interesting than that,’” explains the ivory-tickling yeti in question, Peter Halstead, over lunch at his

two-Steinway but otherwise understated home at the end of Lake Creek Road in Edwards. “I saw this gorgeous picture of the Chugach Range outside of Valdez where a lot of extreme skiing movies are filmed, and we hired the same guys who take the heli skiers, and I did this thing.”

But why the hirsute suit?

“Who cares about a 67-year-old guy playing the piano?” laughs Halstead, resembling an outdoorsy Richard Attenborough. “Nobody! But a yeti—now people might pay attention.”

“If you think about it, it really is another example of what we’re so passionate about: bringing music to everybody, and to young people especially, and letting people have a new way into it,” interjects his wife, Cathy, an abstract painter stylishly dressed in black jeans.

As trustees of the Sidney E. Frank Foundation and the Tippet Rise Foundation since 2006—when Cathy’s father, the Grey

Goose billionaire Sidney Frank, died—the Halsteads have already done much to support their passion, donating millions of dollars to arts and music education programs in Colorado and across the country, from the Juilliard School to the Aspen and Bravo! Vail music festivals. Now they are about to begin the permitting process for Tippet Rise Colorado, a classical music education center and performance venue—similar to a project the Halsteads are pursuing in Montana—with a recording studio, a small suite for visiting musicians, classrooms for lessons and lectures, and a one-of-a-kind outdoor amphitheater without walls or ceiling that’s being designed by Arup, the concert hall engineering firm famous for the Sydney Opera House. Sited atop a rise above their home, resembling a crown, and designed to capture sound and focus it back on an audience of no more than 75, the band shell is intended to reproduce the acoustics of the intimate halls for which Haydn, Mozart, and Bach composed chamber music during the Baroque and Classical eras.

“At Red Rocks, people are blown away by the power of the music, and it used to be that way with classical music, too,” explains Peter, who decamped with Cathy to their sprawling Edwards ranch in 1990 after raising their children in New York City. “Bach and Haydn wrote for and performed in tiny rooms that conveyed the same kind of power and emotion that rock and

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roll has because of electricity. ... But in America, that space doesn’t exist. So we said, ‘Let’s return that power and emotion to classical music. Let’s build a hall that Haydn and Mozart would have loved.’”

So soon, perhaps by this decade’s end, Halstead won’t have to hire a helicopter whenever he wants to play atop a peak. —TK