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RESPECT-inspired piano by Saverio Truglia



honors hope and a child's heartfelt wish. And it lives on in a gift immortalized by kindness and painted into a musical legacy that will love on for generations.

We are thrilled to spotlight the philanthropic tale of the gifted Steinway piano and all the lives it brought together. Read on.

In harmony with one of Aretha Franklin's greatest runaway hits, *Respect*, and the making of a movie about her life starring musical powerhouse Jennifer Hudson, Steinway & Sons graciously donated a bespoke piano to Charity Auctions Today with all proceeds earmarked for the Julian D. King Gift Foundation. Jennifer and her sister Julia founded the foundation in honor of Jennifer's nephew, Julia's son, who died tragically at the age of seven. The Foundation provides underpriv-

ileged children with school supplies, and honors them during the holiday season.

While Steinway pianos have historically garnered accolades as the gold standard of musical instruments for some 160 years, this one-of-a-kind piano made history of its own this year. Not only was it custom crafted to pay tribute to Aretha Franklin's long-time affinity for the piano maker's iconic baby grands – she played on Steinways throughout her lifelong career – it was gifted in conjunction with the highly anticipated release of the film *RESPECT* with the Grammy and Academy Award® Winner actress who was tapped to play Aretha.

Sharing a similar background in music and life, Jennifer Hudson was personally hand selected for the part by Aretha herself, spending as much time together as they could discussing the movie and strengthening their bond before Aretha passed away in 2018. "We all have ups and downs and triumphs. To know how much her music was the narrative of her life gives the music that much more power and truth," she said. As you can imagine, Hudson, predicted to be an Oscar contender for her role, sang her heart out in the movie.

"You cannot play Aretha without doing your homework," Hudson admitted, adding that she "took the initiative to take piano lessons and learn as many of Aretha's songs as I could." Throughout the film, you'll see that the Steinway piano she plays shapes the songs, becoming a crucial presence in countless scenes. That Steinway contributed an upright Boston Performance Edition piano to celebrate Aretha's musical genius and support the charitable foundation of the star who brought her music back to life makes this piano even more priceless.

Now proudly displaying the word RESPECT in black letters across the front of the piano, Hudson commissioned mural artists Menace Two and Resa Piece to put their own special touch on the iconic instrument. Having painted several similarly inspired murals

in Hudson's own home, the wonderfully talented artists added to this work of art with a magnificently colored palette and design, bedazzled with more than 1,000 Swarovski crystals. The artist duo was traveling across the country, living out of a bus with their cat, when Jennifer contacted them to paint the piano for her.

"We painted this Diva piano with all of Jennifer's favorite things. She likes a range of bright colors and she really likes gems, things that shimmer and shine. We decided to mix all these things together and throw in a little bit of gold to represent her heart of gold," they explained, knowing that all the proceeds of the auctioned piano would go to help the kids in Chicago that Jennifer's foundation services.

"Certainly, everyone at Steinway is very proud that our pianos are featured so prominently in this amazing film," said Gavin English, President, Steinway & Sons Americas. "But the connection to RESPECT has become so much more meaningful for our ability to collaborate with MGM Studios and raise money for Ms. Hudson's foundation. The Julian D. King Gift Foundation has helped so many young people and will continue to do so for years to come. We are thrilled to be able to donate this piano—an outstanding piece of



art in its own right, to honor Julian and to help fund the Foundation's activities."

The piano auction began on the MGM film's release date, August 13, 2021, ending on September 27 with a winning bid of \$28,000. We caught up with Rich Langsford, the new owner, shortly after he won the piano, congratulating him on owning a piece of history, and asking him what his plans were for this prized piano.

"Being able to provide positive experiences to kids by contributing to the Julian King Gift Foundation, and at the same time having this musical and artistic masterpiece as part of our family, just seemed like a win-win to me. I love the bright artwork from Menace and Resa and the Steinway sound from this Boston upright. I think both will be loved by our four grandkids and will inspire their own creativity in the years to come." □

## A Gifted Piano and the Artists Who Immortalized It

BY CINDY CLARKE

This is a story that has respect written all over it. Respect for the life of the Queen of Soul. Respect for the star who brings her back to life. Respect for the musicians that fill our souls with hope. Respect for the artists who bring joy to the world. Respect for the

filmmakers who help us remember. And respect for lives we'll never forget.

It starts with a filmed MGM tribute to songstress Aretha Franklin. It continues with a superstar transformed by her music. It plays out on pianos crafted by the best. It



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