Grammy-nominated pianist Vicki Ray visits CPP

Lauren Nguyen, Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, November 10, 2014 7:46 pm

On Wednesday, the music department hosted the Shpachenko & Friends Chamber Music Festival. Grammy nominee and Steinway pianist Vicki Ray came to campus to offer valuable feedback to music students and perform a solo recital.

The event consisted of two parts. The first portion was a master class, which was offered at noon in the Music Recital Hall. Students performed in front of Ray and other professional musicians. The second portion followed later that night, when Ray performed a solo music recital.

Associate Music Professor Nadia Shpachenko-Gottesman organized the festival to give students an opportunity to work closely with professional musicians. The master class exemplified the university’s learn-by-doing approach.

Shpachenko-Gottesman selected students who are currently taking the piano seminar and piano studio courses for performances. Ray demonstrated while the students tried out new ideas and improved their skills.

Ray educated students on music from different periods and times. Students were able to see and witness how she interpreted a wide range pieces.

Ray found interacting with the students rewarding.

“They were so receptive, responsive, flexible and well-prepared but willing to try new things right on the spot,” said Ray. “All of them were very talented and very impressive.

“Even though music is something we listen to, we also learn by watching. Maybe if they could see me doing it, I could be walking the talk as they say.”

After each student’s performance, Ray engaged with each performer. She critiqued them and gave them feedback improve their piece. The students then played certain portions again with her suggestions and showed immediate improvement.
Ray did not limit her attention to only the student performers. She interacted with the audience by explaining her feedback. The crowd was filled with attentive music students learning from the discussion while taking notes of their own.

Josh Garrett, a second-year music student, attended both the master class and concert.

“It was interesting to see Vicki’s opinion on the students’ pieces,” said Garrett. “It’s very hands-on because you get criticisms right there from people that aren’t music faculty.”

Following the master class was Ray’s solo piano recital, which took place on the same stage at 8 p.m. Ray performed a solo piano composition, “Exquisite Corps(e),” which incorporated works from a variety of composers, including faculty from the California Institute of the Arts. Violinist Sarah Thornblade joined Ray for the performance of “Trembling” by Morton Subotnick.

She also integrated other instruments and everyday items into the musical mix. A recorder, handheld fan, forks and a thumb piano from Africa were a few objects Ray utilized alongside the piano.

The unconventional approach left students inspired. Students thanked Shpachenko-Gottesman for bringing Ray there. Many claimed that it was different from anything they ever experienced and thought it was vivid, colorful and imaginative.

“It’s always super beneficial to see another pianist play,” said Ray. “It exposes them to not only my ideas about how they should play standard repertoire but play this new stuff that gives more breadth and perspective.”

Shpachenko-Gottesman emphasized the importance to attend both the master class and concert.

“The teaching and performance went hand-in-hand because when you teach you give an example of what you’re doing and learning,” said Shpachenko-Gottesman. “It’s a process of how to become a performer. You want to learn from the teacher and work with them and [have them] explain things and address the areas you need help with.

“Being able to learn from an artist opposed to just observing the teaching and listening to them perform is definitely the complete package.”