



# THE DRANOFF INTERNATIONAL 2 PIANO FOUNDATION

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## CLASSICAL PIANISTS INSPIRE KIDS TO CREATE POETRY

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### CLASSICAL PIANISTS INSPIRE

There's a little rhythm and rhyme in the hallways at Horace Mann Middle School. Kids who usually tune in to Ne-Yo and T.I. are openly reciting poems inspired by a 17th Century Irish dance tune that speaks of church bells and solitude. The students at Mann -- as well as three other Miami-Dade public schools -- heard the song last week when the silver-medal winners of the Drano International Two Piano Foundation's annual competition, Sarah and Susan Wang, came to play. It was a tough crowd. Some kids slept. Others text messaged in the dark auditorium. But many of the students at the El Portal school listened intently to the pieces composed by Chopin and Mozart, as played by the 25-year-old-twin pianists. The finals of the Drano competition are held every three years in Miami and features pianists between 21 and 30 from around the globe. The Wangs are the first American winners in 20 years. "I was trying to watch their hands move. They go so fast," said Felix Gonzalez, 15, who craned his neck during the performance. The students received a CD of the Irish composition as part of the Drano Foundation's school outreach program. Their homework: Return to class this week and begin working with spoken word artists to craft poetry based on the music. Nine winners -- two from each school and a best overall -- will perform their pieces in May at the John S. & James L. Knight Concert Hall at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts. Piano Slam -- The Music Speaks will feature piano duo Maarten and Jeroen Van Veen, 2005 winners of the Drano competition, and spoken word poets Mecca (aka Grimo) and Deborah Magdalena Torres, who helped pump up the Horace Mann students.

"You know something? Classical music is very revolutionary," she shouted. "Mozart and Beethoven were revolutionary dudes." "They were the Tupacs and the Lil Waynes of their day." "I'm really excited about this project because my background is classical music," said Torres, sister of artist Nestor Torres. Torres will work with the Horace Mann students on their spoken-word pieces. The project is part of the Drano Foundation's performance and education program, A Family of Music Lovers. More than 35,000 public school children in Miami-Dade County have been involved with the program since its inception in 2004.

"Music and literary arts as a formal part of primary education has become a leading indicator for successful academic performance and graduation," said Drano Foundation Executive Director Carlene Sawyer. "Unfortunately, this is an area that is quite resource-poor in many schools," Sawyer said, adding that families should avail themselves of the free concert in May. "This program will bring enrichment to many children in communities with little or no access to these professional artists." In addition to Horace Mann, the program involves students at Brownsville, Jose de Diego and Edison middle schools. This was Horace Mann's first year, said Principal Carmen Jones-Carey.

"This was such a unique opportunity for my kids," Jones-Carey said. "I had one kid tell me, 'I never thought I would like that kind of music.' That was awesome." The kids asked the Wangs how long they had played (they started at 7 in their hometown of Ridgewood, N.J.) and how much they practice (up to five hours a day). The twins, who graduated from the University of Michigan and received master's degrees from the Manhattan School of Music, now work as professional musicians. They live in Rostock, Germany, and perform throughout Europe and the United States.

"Do you ever make mistakes?" one boy queried.

"Yeah, we do," said a smiling Sarah Wang. "And we try to cover it up. Why? Did you notice?"