

Lights out for Earth Hour

Eco-warrior Frank Horvat keeps his concert audience in the dark

By Adrian Chamberlain, Times Colonist September 25, 2010



Frank Horvat found more sponsorship for his eco-concert in Victoria than in any other Canadian city

Photograph by: Courtesy, Frank Horvat

Boom boom out go the lights.

-- Little Walter

It sounds like the ultimate West Coast happening. Tonight, Toronto pianist Frank Horvat plays a free eco-friendly concert in Victoria. The evening's highlight will be a one-hour composition, Earth Hour, which Horvat will play in absolute darkness.

The audience is also in the dark. Which is, well ... pretty far out, man.

The solo concert starts at 7:30 p.m. at Grace Lutheran Church, 1273 Fort St. Earth Hour is played in the latter half, so it'll be sufficiently dusky. The event is part of Horvat's Green Keys Tour, one of 50-plus concerts he's performing across Canada over a year to promote eco-sustainability. And to showcase his music, of course.

As one might expect, Earth Hour will be a relaxing, contemplative experience. It's arpeggio-filled pop-classical-style music somewhat reminiscent of Philip Glass's solo piano work.

Horvat, 36, got the idea for Earth Hour at a swanky shindig in Toronto last year. It was an Earth Hour party -- Earth Hour being the annual global event held on the last Saturday of March. Households and businesses voluntarily stop using electricity for an hour to promote awareness of climate change and energy-saving practices.

Anyway, Horvat was hired to play cocktail music at the soiree on the 40th floor of a Bay Street skyscraper. The toast of Toronto was there -- folk such as Premier Dalton McGuinty and Mayor David Miller. At 8:30 p.m. the lights went out. Everyone congregated on one side of the room to hear speeches and watch the city lights extinguish.

Left on his own at the piano, sitting in the dark, Horvat started tinkling the keys.

"It got me thinking about darkness and what it's like to be in the dark. The feeling inside you and thinking about your little spot in the world, how you fit in."

The experience was the seed for Earth Hour, found on his new CD, *A Little Dark Music*. Horvat has performed the piece (which was composed in the dark) regularly on his Green Keys Tour. He says people find it moving.

There was, for instance, a nun in North Bay, Ont., who approached Horvat afterward to tell him how Earth Hour warmed her very soul. In Toronto, a man confided that listening in the dark had lulled him into a deep meditative state. "He said there were moments of clarity and a feeling of contentment," Horvat said.

The pianist finds playing the piece so relaxing and contemplative, he must work hard to maintain his focus lest he lose his way. The composition is designed to be exactly one hour long -- Horvat ensures this by playing to a prerecorded click track.

It's called the Green Keys Tour because Horvat wants to spread the good word on eco-friendly practices. It transpires he's an eco-zealot -- an avid Prius-driver whose CD case is printed on recycled paper using vegetable ink. Horvat and his wife just got their century-old home draft-proofed and purchased a high-efficiency furnace. He buys organic food, locally grown.

Horvat confessed that on tour he is forced to commit the sin of pollution. That is, he occasionally takes a plane. He pays penance by purchasing carbon offset credits. Meanwhile, he takes public transportation as much as possible. For example, he'll hop on the bus to travel from Victoria to his Nanaimo concert at St. Paul's Anglican Church (2 p.m. on Sunday).

Sponsors make it possible for him to offer all his concerts free of charge. Here again, Horvat is greener than a bullfrog. In fact, his national sponsor is Bullfrog Power (100 per cent green electricity). As far as local sponsorships go, he said Victoria and area has offered the most plentiful green business support of any city in Canada. His sponsors include the Inn at Laurel Point, Dockside Green, Silk Road and Salt Spring Coffee.

Horvat, buoyed by interest in his Green Keys project, would like to do similar tours in the U.S. and Europe.

"There's a lot of like-minded people out there who care about these things very passionately," he said.

For a video of Frank Horvat play Earth Hour click [here](#)

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