

# FROM EASTER ISLAND TO KANSAS CITY POLYNESIAN PIANIST TO PLAY THE FOLLY

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By Patrick Neas

**T**he Harriman-Jewell Series' 59th season is chock-full of longtime favorites like Emanuel Ax, as well as exciting new offerings, including a collaboration with the Mark Morris Dance Group celebrating the late, great Kansas City native Burt Bacharach. There are also some of the world's finest orchestras and free Discovery concerts, too.

Easter Island, Chile, also known as Rapa Nui, is one of the most remote inhabited islands in the world. With a population of a little more than 5,000 people and dotted with 1,000 monumental sculptures known as moai, it is an island of myth, magic and mystery.

Mahani Teave, an acclaimed international pianist who was born in Hawaii to a Rapa Nui father and an American mother, was raised on Easter Island. She is also co-founder of the island's first music school.

Teave will make her American recital debut on the Harriman-Jewell Series Sept. 9 at the Folly Theater. The free Discovery concert will open the Series' 59th season.

Teave was 9 years old when the first piano arrived on Easter Island, and the little girl was entranced. She began taking piano lessons and was obviously a musical prodigy. When her teacher left the island, Teave's family moved to mainland Chile so the girl could continue her musical training.

"We often see with child prodigies and other musicians that have an instant connection to their instrument that's innate," said Clark Morris, executive and artistic director of the Harriman-Jewell Series. "It's inside them even before they've had a formal introduction to training."

Teave received her formal training at Chile's Austral University and at the Cleveland Institute of Music. She has won many important music competitions, including the Cleveland Institute of Music Concerto Competition in 2004, the Claudio Arrau International Piano Competition in 1999 and the Merit Prize from Andrés Bello University in Chile in 2012.



PHOTO BY PILAR CASTRO

With all of her accomplishments and international acclaim, Teave never forgot Easter Island. She returned to found its first music school in 2011. The Rapa Nui School of Music and the Arts started holding its classes in churches and teachers' homes, but a crowdfunding campaign and contributions from people all over the world made it possible for Teave to build a music school that reflects her environmental activism.

"It's a really intriguing place," Morris said. "It's built with ecology and the environment in mind. There are old tires which form the structure of the walls with bottles and cans in the walls themselves. The school collects rainwater and is solar-powered. It's really beautiful, just gorgeous. They teach both traditional island music and classical music. It's an incredible story about being true to your homeland but also bringing international culture to the local culture."

Morris says that Teave's devotion to bringing music to the people makes her a perfect choice for a Harriman-Jewell Series Discovery concert.

"I believe she would be popular enough and has such an interesting story that she would be great on our Main Stage concerts," Morris said, "but we intentionally made her a Discovery concert because the spirit of what she's trying to do on her home island matches what we're trying to do here in Kansas City, which is to provide opportunities for people to hear classical music."

The school teaches not only Western classical music but also traditional Polynesian music. Morris says he hopes that Teave will perform both in Kansas City.

"I've heard recordings of her playing Handel and Chopin, so she is centered on the core literature of the classical canon," Morris said. "But as far as what she ends up playing on our program, I'm not sure. My hope is that there might be some way to represent Polynesian music that's indigenous to Easter Island."

Teave gives of herself beyond educating students at her school. She also performs in hospitals, schools, jails and disadvantaged areas, anywhere people are in need of the healing power of music.

"There's this magical quality to the whole story of Easter Island," Morris said. "And to have someone like Mahani, who is adding to the culture both by embracing the traditional culture and adding to that culture by bringing in Western classical music is a way to connect to something that is so remote and distant from us but something we should know about. We feel very fortunate that we get to bring her to Kansas City."

To reserve tickets and for a complete listing of all concerts, go to [hjseries.org](http://hjseries.org).

