



Tracy and some of her students at last year's Skype concert. :: SUR

Piano players of the world unite! (via Skype)

A British piano teacher is hosting an innovative webcast concert with players performing over the internet in Órgiva at the weekend

:: POLLY RODGER BROWN

MALAGA. This Saturday afternoon (March 21st) the Órgiva campsite hosts an unusual event, even by the standards of this mountain town in the Alpujarra region of Granada, well-known for its long-established alternative communities.

The Music Lessons Anywhere Spring Concert brings together performances from over 30 piano students. They're an eclectic bunch - the piano players come from America, Australia, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Spain and the UK and range in ages from six to 70. The youngest will struggle to climb onto the piano stool. One is a doctor, one is a satellite expert, another a librarian. Some are beginners, frowning in concentration as they tentatively work their way through simple scores and others are powering their way through the curriculum for high level ABRSM (Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music) exams.

Unexpectedly, only 20 of the budding pianists will play in person. A few have recorded videos of their performances which will be broadcast on a huge screen during the concert. A number will play live from their own homes abroad, via Skype. The whole concert, two hours long, will be broadcast live as a webcast and will then be available to view online.

This is not the first time this unusual musical event has taken place, however. It is the second.

"Last year there was a gasp from the audience when I Skyped Vishan in India to perform. The audience knew it was going to happen because it was in the programme, but to actually see it was something else. And for me too, knowing the planning had paid off!" says Barnsley-born pi-

ano teacher Tracy Rose, who lives in a restored 'cortijo' close to Órgiva and is the creator of Music Lessons Anywhere, an online service which offers Skype-based piano lessons to anyone, wherever they are in the world.

And Vishan is one of Tracy's 45 students. Another lives in the US Embassy in Chile. One, Samuel, Skypes from his father's narrow boat using a mobile phone connection. Some have huge grand pianos, others play on more modest electronic keyboards. All have become friends, says Tracy who was recently sent a box of Saudi dates from a student after the two had had a discussion about them.

Tracy started playing the piano at the age of six - "I have no idea really where being musical comes from. My mother is tone deaf although apparently my great grandpa was an amazing spoon player" - and began teaching pretty much as soon as she could. In 1998 she left Manchester and moved to Spain with her husband Paul, a graphic and website designer.

"We fancied a bit of a life change so I came over on holiday and approached Almuñécar International School about a job," she explains. "I

REMOTE CONCERT

► **When.** Saturday March 21st 3pm

► **Where.** Camping Órgiva (Carretera A-348, south of Órgiva) or online from 2.30pm via www.ustream.tv/channel/concert-musiclessonsanywhere-net

► **Contact.** To attend in person contact Tracy Rose by email first (tracyrose@musiclessonsanywhere.net).

did a demonstration and before I knew it I was a classroom teacher."

After two years in Almuñécar and then 13 years as Head of Music at St George's British School in Malaga Tracy embarked on yet another life change and left her job to launch Music Lessons Anywhere, not just getting students through their ASRSM exams but also instilling a love of all kinds of music, of performing and composition.

Now she works full-time from home and is getting very close to the stage where she will be unable to accept new students. Future plans include an online music school with teachers of a range of instruments trained by Tracy to follow her own holistic style of teaching where what each student is like, enjoys and wants to do, comes first.

"It just works really well. Exam results are higher on average with Skype lessons. Some people think online teaching is being taught by an android, but you still have that teacher-pupil connection. Students are more focused with far fewer distractions. And the convenience - you can be your own home, totally relaxed and you've got your own instrument there. That's part of it," says Tracy who adds, laughing, that she often comes in from working outside on her vegetable plot and only needs to tidy up her top half to look smart for lessons.

However Tracy accepts that learning online can be isolating. Hence the brainwave in 2014 to host a concert where students who lived nearby were able to play live and those who didn't could send in their performances over the ether.

In the kind of odd twist that modern technology makes possible, a British woman who now lives in Órgiva and recommended Tracy as a teacher to her family back in Newcastle, will be watching in person as her granddaughter Bela plays on Saturday via Skype.