

# 2 Pianos 4 Hands at the Chemainus Theatre Festival April 7-May 14, 2017. A review.

April 11, 2017 By @lacouvee [Leave a Comment](#)

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When Ted (**Max Roll**) and Richard (**Bryce Kulak**) walk onstage and begin goofing around with the piano benches before sitting down to play the first tentative notes, the emotional connection is immediate—I grew up the eldest child in a family with a piano. There was no question that I would have piano lessons. Many years later my children endured endless reminders to practice. The situations and dilemmas recounted in *2 Pianos 4 Hands* (by Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt) have a particular resonance that, while appearing to be highly specific, transcend the discipline of classical piano and translate to any endeavour requiring effort. Anyone who has ever undertaken a sport, picked up a paint brush, tied on dance shoes or tried to sing will feel a connection to the two young protagonists and the pursuit for perfection.



Max Roll and Bryce Kulak. Image provided.

The set is dominated by two grand pianos with two large ornate frames—serving as a base for projections and shadow work—on the back wall.

Beginning with two beloved (or annoying—depending on your perspective) beginners pieces *Chopsticks* and *Heart and Soul* (songs guaranteed to make most true pianists shout “stop!”) young Teddy and Ritchie move quickly to endless scales and fingering exercises as they strive to outshine one another with their virtuosity. A chance meeting at a piano competition leads to years of rivalry, during their formative teen years. While other kids are out running around, our intrepid pair revel in or rue the hours of practice—forced on by admonishing parents and teachers that are rarely pleased. Roll and Kulak switch easily back and forth between their roles as young pianists and all the adults in their lives—high-pitched Sister Loyola, Monsieur Frog, Mr. Scarlatti, one-bit Birkoff and unhappy fathers—with precision timing; the effect is high comedy.

Writer Richard Greenblatt directs this anniversary production. Pacing is brisk; the amount and level of music played—truly impressive. It takes considerable acumen and training to perform as both actor and musician—Roll and Kulak are highly accomplished in these demanding dual roles. Any classical music aficionado will instantly recognize beloved pieces by Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Liszt and Schubert. The boys do battle—hilariously—over *In the Hall of the Mountain King* by Grieg.

As the stakes heighten and the pressure to perform at a high level accelerates, the story takes a more sombre turn—rejected by the Conservatory of Music and the Jazz Faculty, our two young heroes are forced to confront a harsh and brutal reality—they simply aren't good enough for either. Rich becomes an underage pianist in a bar and Ted begins teaching adults at the local music school. Despite what could be seen as a crushing blow to creativity and ego, somehow they soldier on and come to terms with being the best pianists "in the neighbourhood". When one considers the world-wide success of what has now become a true franchise, having played to audiences on five continents and in over 150 cities since its inception in 1996, it is truly fortunate that Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt were able to move on from what could have been crushing defeat, to find artistic success and happiness.

Balancing comedy with gravitas, classical and pop, music and theatre, Kulak and Roll excel at re-interpreting a semi-autobiographical piece for a new audience. As *2 Pianos 4 Hands* enters its third decade, success continues to be guaranteed by the next generation. As long as parents have aspirations for their children, its message will continue to tug at peoples' hearts.

**2 Pianos 4 Hands by Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt**

**Chemainus Theatre Festival**

**April 6-May 14, 2017**

**Tickets: Tickets: \$26-\$69 without buffet \$38-98 with—depending on day and time**

**250-246-9820 / Toll Free: 1-800-565-7738**

Email:[info@chemainustheatre.ca](mailto:info@chemainustheatre.ca)

Directed by **Richard Greenblatt**

Featuring:

**Bryce Kulak** Richard

**Max Roll** Ted

Production designer **Steve Lucas**

Associate Production Designer **Jason Golinsky**

Stage Manager **Andrea Schurman**

Apprentice Stage Manager **Becca Jorgensen**

Technical Director **Brendan Gilhuly**

Producer **Colin Rivers**

Piano Technician **Robert Haist**