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**The Ethan Effect: Engineering student and gifted pianist inspires Steinway piano campaign**

Written by Carrie Van Hallgren

Ethan Squires was a busy mechanical engineering major and computer science minor at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, holding down a campus job and routinely taking over eighteen credits a semester. He was also a gifted pianist and trombone player who performed in multiple ensembles, composed and arranged music and played for guest artists. Ethan was a familiar fixture in Doudna Hall.

“Ethan was always smiling, always saying hello in the hallway with so much warmth,” said Ethan’s piano instructor, Dr. Kaju Lee.

In the spring of 2024, while completing his co-op with Kohler Power Systems in Sheboygan and preparing the *Khachaturian Piano Concerto* for the fall concerto competition on campus, Ethan died suddenly of complications from type 1 diabetes.

In the weeks and months following the tragic loss, Ethan’s impact on Platteville’s music program—and the program’s impact on his life—became clear. His parents, Jeff and Whitney Squires, established a fund to support causes important to Ethan and approached the music program for gift ideas that would benefit UW-Platteville student musicians like their son.

“We explained that we wanted to do something to remember Ethan, but something meaningful to the music program—a way to honor Ethan and the music program,” said Jeff Squires. “Dr. Lee proposed the idea of a Steinway Model D concert grand piano. Every music program needs two, and UW-Platteville only has one. We thought, ‘What better way to honor Ethan and to honor the music program than to help secure this world-class piano?’”

A year after his passing, the Ethan Squires Fund committed to a matching gift to the university for the purchase of a Steinway Model D in memory of Ethan. The UW-Platteville Foundation and Alumni Association and the Department of Performing and Visual Arts hope to raise $105,000 from alumni and other donors to complete the match, with the goal of debuting the piano in spring 2026.

The instrument will touch every music student, regardless of whether they play piano. It will accompany choirs, vocal and instrumental solos and ensembles. The piano will be used in rehearsals and performances for orchestras and bands, for guest artists and for community events and music competitions.

“Audiences will hear and feel the beauty of this powerful sound. It will raise the level of everything we do,” explained Lee.

**Ethan’s Legacy at UW-Platteville**

Ethan arrived in Platteville in the fall of 2020, a difficult and isolating year for college freshmen everywhere. It wasn’t until his sophomore year that he decided to pursue music on campus by joining the symphony band as a trombone player. He quickly rose through the program, joining Dr. Daniel Rowland’s low brass studio and the top wind ensemble. His piano skill, however, remained a secret to many until Rowland encouraged Ethan to meet Lee.

“I still remember our first meeting so clearly. He brought in Interstellar, the film score, and played it for me. He didn’t say much about his past awards or piano competition wins across Wisconsin—he was very humble. But the way he played—with so much sincere feeling—I could tell right away that he had a deep connection to music,” Lee recalled.

Ethan brought his engineering mind to his musical endeavors, analyzing compositions, trying alternative slide positions on his trombone and deconstructing the music in his favorite movies and television shows.

“Even with his demanding course load, Ethan always made time for music,” remembered Whitney Squires. “It was his stress relief and his joy. It was how he processed his emotions.”

His deep connection to music was matched by his connection to the people who shared it with him.

“He loved the music program at UW-Platteville,” Jeff Squires explained.

And the program loved him back. Faculty and students alike remember Ethan as humble and supportive, stepping in to help anyone who was struggling with a challenging piece, or just a difficult day.

Ethan’s friends coined the term, “The Ethan Effect” as way of explaining his positive impact on every person he encountered.

“He had an unlimited amount of time and resources for everyone,” said friend Levi Turner. “He had one of the busiest schedules I’ve ever seen, but he would take the time to sit down and talk to anybody at any time.”

“He gave so much to our community,” shared Lee. “In studio class, he offered warm, thoughtful feedback to his peers. As an advanced pianist, he helped make our space kind, supportive and encouraging for everyone.”

**Why a Steinway Model D**

“The Steinway Model D Concert Grand is not just any piano,” explained Lee. “It’s one of the most respected concert grands in the world, chosen by the greatest pianists for its tone and power.”

Each piano is handcrafted at the Steinway factory in Queens, New York and considered a masterpiece of form and function. Ninety-seven percent of solo pianists choose to perform on this instrument.

“I’m sure he would appreciate that we are procuring one of the best pieces of machinery for his art that literally exists in this world,” remarked Rowland with a smile.

All agree that this extraordinary piano will be a fitting tribute to an engineer-musician who pursued excellence in all areas of his life.

“Made possible by Ethan’s parents, this instrument is more than a piano. It is a tribute to Ethan’s memory. Every time a student plays it, I hope they feel a little of Ethan—his kindness, his joy and his deep love for music. He is still with us in sound, in story and in heart,” said an emotional Lee.