

## Portrait of a pianist as a young man



Pianist/composer Alex Raineri.

Photo: *Rodger Cummins*

By Anne Crawford

October 20, 2007

PIANIST and composer Alex Raineri is checking the acoustics of St Michael's Uniting Church, playing the *Intermezzo* from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, pale fingers fluid as they ripple across the keys, occasionally pouncing as he reaches a crescendo, then still as he pauses to consider.

He worries aloud about whether the piano is in quite the right position for his Australian Virtuoso 2 concert in the Collins Street church tomorrow. The award-winning pianist, who is about to release his third album and has just written part of a score for a feature film, is leaving nothing to chance. This concert launches a three-year tour playing in castles and cathedrals in Australia, Europe and America. "I've realised, over the years, that it's the performance that's the most important thing - if you screw that up it's all pointless."

"Over the years" sounds a long time - to any other career pianist perhaps decades - but in Alex Raineri's case it's not. He is 14.

Slight and softly spoken, he answers questions thoughtfully, occasionally wryly.

He says he first hit the ivories of the "run-down" family piano in Brisbane at the age of four, although he can't remember why - his parents Michele and Aldo weren't musical. He performed at music school concerts at five or six and "got into the Con" (Queensland Conservatorium of Music) at 11, by which time he was composing his own music. He also gave his first overseas recital at 11, performing solo touring Germany with a string ensemble. While other children his age dreamed of what they would do when they grew up, Alex Raineri was already doing it.

Like other teenagers, he watches a lot of television, spends time "doing nothing" and hours listening to contemporary music. But, "not pop and heavy metal - away with that," he says. . He does his daily home schooling in two hours.

The Castles and Cathedrals benefit tour opens up a world stage as he plays, it is hoped, before dignitaries and global leaders, perhaps royalty and the Pope. It was devised by impresario Nell

Arnold, continuing a program she ran in the late '70s and '80s in England and America. It matches music and humanitarian causes, airing the talents of young performers while raising money, in Alex's case to help counter polio, AIDS and other diseases in Africa. His haunting compositions, *Shadow Sketches*, speak of the loss, fear and hope of people affected by these diseases. His parents, who manage his career, and sister Laura, will tour with him in shifts.

Professor Arnold, an adjunct professor at the University of Queensland, first heard Alex play "on a battered piano in a school gym" in April. "He was stunning," she says. US conductors and musicians hearing his CDs commented on the "extraordinary creativity". Schoolchildren in America got up out of their seats and danced.

*Alex Raineri at St Michael's Church, 120 Collins St., 1pm tomorrow. Tickets: at door or [www.3MBSboxoffice.com](http://www.3MBSboxoffice.com)*

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