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Verona Pianist Gets In A 'Midnight' Mood

BY THOMAS CARLIN

Verona born pianist Keith Elkinson's new album, "Midnight Conversation," could be described as many things—sweet, romantic, calm, soothing.

"One critic said it was depressing," Elkinson said, speaking from his Georgia home.

Actually, the pianist describes his music in a simpler form: "It's piano solo."

The songs on his latest CD, "Midnight Conversation" mix elements of classical, jazz and a little new age. The musician chose the song as the album title because it captured the mood of the material. "It has a romantic feel, it's laid back."

One of the things that excited him most about recording the album was the chance to play on a 1918 Steinway piano.

"The sound is incredible. It's a hard piano to play, though. The keys are a little slippery because they're made of real ivory," he observes.

For "Midnight Conversation," Elkinson even got his family into the act. His girlfriend did the CD's calligraphy and his brother wrote a poem for the inner sleeve. The song titles were named by family and friends.

One friend who had a lot of influence was Denise Bastanza, conductor of the Verona Cedar Grove Chorus.

Grove Chorus. Bastanza was Elkinson's babysitter in 1977 and took on Elkinson as her first student. "He showed an interest in music, and I taught him for five years," she notes. "He caught on [to the piano] very fast."

To Elkinson songwriting is like a puzzle, putting various pieces of musical fragments together to create a cohesive unit. "I could never sit down and write a song in 10 minutes. The last one took

(Continued On Page 9)

about nine months," he noted.

Elkinson has a deep admiration for musicians who can perform and keep their arrangements simple. He does not particularly care for the overdone arrangements favored by the likes of Yanni or John Tesh. "I don't like the production—or-orchestration," he noted. "Although if you have the patience to do it...I'm a big Yes fan and they do it well. It seems to work better in rock music.

Elkinson listens to a everything from Snoop Doggy Dogg to jazz to classical. And some alternative music: "although it's getting hard to distinguish bands."

As far as concert staging, he prefers to keep things simple as opposed to the stadium extravaganzas favored by the likes of U2's current tour.

"Sometimes it adds to the music, like in the case of Pink Floyd, but in the case of U2...I preferred the simpler staging they used [in the 80s], but I can see it from their side. There are only so many times you can perform 'New Year's Day' before you get tired of it."

As for his own touring plans for "Midnight Conversation," Elkinson is considering a college campus tour, or opening for an established artist such as George Winston.

Elkinson wrote eight or nine songs for his follow-up album, which he describes as "more complex and more upbeat" than "Midnight Conversation."

He added, however, that he "would rather perform in front of



CONVERSATION PIECE. Verona native Keith Elkinson, whose latest CD "Midnight Conversation" mixes several musical styles, sits down to fiddle the ivories in his Georgia home.

Correction

The name of the Verona pianist who recently released a new CD is Kenneth Elkinson, not Keith, as reported in last week's feature story.