

Perfect pitch, classically trained

By Derek Wiley
The Dalles Chronicle

THE DALLES (AP) — Faith Gouge is fluent in two languages — English and Russian.

But The Dalles 9-year-old does most of her talking through music.

She gets that from her mother.

Tanya Gouge, who plays piano on Sunday mornings at First United Methodist and St. Peter's Catholic Church, grew up in Ukraine.

Along with going to a regular school, Tanya and her two brothers also went to a music school for seven years. She then went to college for music and began teaching piano lessons at Columbia River Music when she moved to The Dalles in 2005.

When Tanya was pregnant, she would go to tap dance classes and listen to classical music.

"I was really hungry for that," Tanya said. "I never had access and I knew she was kind of responding. I knew she was going to love music."

Once Faith was born in 2006, Tanya quickly noticed her rhythm.

"She was moving

rhythmically so I knew she was going to be very talented," Tanya said. "She couldn't walk yet but she was dancing to music."

At age 3, Faith picked out her first musical instrument. But it wasn't a piano.

"She was in a stroller and I took her to a music store and there was a violin teacher," Tanya said. "She started with a violin. She wanted it. It was also fun because I play piano and I knew I would teach her (piano) but I don't play violin. She was three years old and we would play together and it was so much fun."

Faith still has the small violin and doesn't want to sell it.

When she was 4, Faith began playing the piano. She would sit in her mom's lap and play by ear because she couldn't yet read music.

Faith was born with perfect pitch. When her mom plays a note or interval, Faith can identify it right away in English or Russian just by hearing it.

"Some kids struggle with hearing," Tanya said. "She's just a natural, which makes things easier. She can play from ear any song at any time."

Faith put this to the test one

Christmas when she played her grandfather's favorite song — "Amazing Grace."

"There was no practice and she started playing," Tanya said. "She just knows whether the tune goes up or down. If she's already heard it before, she can play it."

At 5, Faith began taking piano lessons twice a month in Portland with Elena Istratova, who grew up in the Soviet Union and has 32 years of teaching experience.

"Russian piano, ballet and music school is one of the best in the world," Tanya said. "I was happy to take her to those classes. She listens to her more than me."

Working with Istratova, Faith began going to piano competitions and won her first one in 2013 at the Contemporary Festival in Portland.

A Level 4 pianist, Faith now has five trophies from competitions organized by the Oregon Music Teachers Association in the Portland Piano Company's four recital halls.

Faith's favorite thing about the competitions, besides winning trophies, is the pianos she gets to play on. Fazioli grand pianos are made in Sacile, Italy and cost about \$250,000 apiece. The Portland Piano

Company has four. "The better the piano the better for your fingers," Tanya said. "They're still researching and they patent every new invention, how to make longer sound. The Fazioli does something super special with longer keys. It's really cool. They have those at every Portland competition. And they let small kids do recitals. That's pretty cool."

Faith's biggest trophy came from Eugene when she won the Level 4 2014 Oregon State Sonata-Sonatina at the University of Oregon.

"State was tough because you had to play the same song as everyone," Tanya said. "They come from Southern Oregon and Bend. They come from everywhere but mostly Portland and Eugene."

After the competition, Faith played in a gala with all the other winners, Levels 1-10.

She hasn't been in a competition since spring but has a class recital in January and a contemporary festival in February. Faith may also compete in the U.S. Open next year in California.

She often plays violin with her mother at church and is joining Kirill Gliadkovsky, who began his musical study

in Moscow at the age of 5 and now lives in Los Angeles, for a special concert on Feb. 12 at Calvary Baptist Church.

Faith's favorite musicians aren't Taylor Swift or One Direction but 70-year-old Israeli-American violinist Itzhak Perlman and 42-year-old Ukrainian-American classical pianist Valentina Lisitsa.

Faith and Tanya saw Perlman in concert in Portland and Faith would like to attend his six-week summer camp in Philadelphia.

Faith, who also owns a ukulele, sings and loves to play percussion instruments as well, isn't sure where she wants music to take her. And her mother isn't putting any pressure on her either.

"If she doesn't want to be a musician, that's OK," Tanya said. "The goal is when you really know music as a language, you are fluent in it, you can express yourself."

"Whenever you are frustrated or upset, music is such a relief. It helps to survive sometimes. You can understand what others are saying. Music can express even more. Music helps a lot. Sometimes you don't have to go to a counselor. You just sit and play."

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