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FEATURED

## Local pianist creates 'symphony for peace'

Julia Grochowski Oct 1, 2018



Malek Jandali speaks with the Roswell Rotary Club Sept. 27 about his experiences that led to the creation of his nonprofit Pianos for Peace.

ROSWELL, Ga. — Award-winning pianist and composer Malek Jandali did not realize the power of music until a piece he played seven years ago resulted in a brutal beating of his parents.

Jandali, a German-born Syrian-American who now lives in Atlanta, performed his original piece "Watani Ana (I am my Homeland)" in Washington D.C. during a demonstration against the Syrian regime. One week later, his family in Syria was attacked and their home ransacked.

He met with Roswell Rotary Club members Sept. 27 to speak about the incident and how he turned it around to create something positive – Pianos for Peace.



"When I saw the pictures of my parents," Jandali said. "That was the first moment in my life that I realized that music is not just entertainment. It has a soft power to change people, impact communities and change the world."

Out of that negative experience, Jandali said he was determined to make something good to bring back to his home community in Atlanta.

He eventually settled on the idea of Pianos for Peace, a nonprofit dedicated to making the arts accessible to all and to spread the message of peace through music.

Through the organization, Jandali brings 50 painted pianos each year to underserved communities, schools, nursing homes and "anyone who can benefit" throughout the Metro Atlanta area. Current piano locations include several MARTA rail stops and local colleges, the airport, Underground Atlanta, Avalon and the Center for Civil and Human Rights. He said he hopes to soon bring one to Roswell.

"When children [in underserved communities] see these pianos, they sing, they dance, they go crazy, because they have a piano," Jandali said. "The same thing at the nursing homes. The elderly with Alzheimer's – they're lonely. I bring that colorful piano...I play a hymn, and emotions come up with everyone. It's amazing."

When he began the project, Jandali said he faced some criticism from people who said the pianos would be stolen soon if left unattended in public spaces. But instead, he found "immeasurable kindness" in people.

The pianos stayed and were taken care of by strangers, who covered them when it was raining. And when they were played, Jandali said the pianos transformed people and spaces.



"This homeless guy came, he sat at the piano, and started playing Chopin," Jandali said. "People then saw him as an artist, as a pianist, not just as a homeless man."

During the meeting, Jandali donated one of these pianos to the Roswell Rotary Club. It will be housed permanently in a nursing home in Flowery Branch.

"I believe music can change people, and people can change the world," Jandali said. "I invite you to join our symphony of peace."

To learn more, view piano locations, get involved or donate to Pianos for Peace, visit [pianosforpeace.org](http://pianosforpeace.org).

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