

The hues of harmony

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Is the key of G-major orange? Do you literally see red when you hear a bright tune in C-major? When songs lilt through minor notes, what swirls through your mind's eye? Blue? Or maybe purple.

In a collision of harmony and hue, pedigreed classical pianist Susan Stubson is teaming up with artist Jim Kopp for an ARTCORE concert Sunday that will have people looking and listening.

The two Casper artists have spent the last month exploring the concept of synesthesia, or music-color associations caused by the tones or keys of music, Stubson said.

The idea of synesthesia has been around for centuries and takes various forms, such as number-color, letter-color and even word-taste associations. Stubson first studied it in college when learning pieces by Alexander Scriabin, a Russian composer and pianist who graphed which colors went with which keys in his mind.

"When he played in C-major, he felt an organic connection with the color red," Stubson said. "His association was so strong that when he was asked to perform in Moscow, he composed pieces to match the purple color of the concert hall."

Stubson isn't going to have First United Methodist Church painted to match her concert, but she is excited to have 10 paintings by Kopp to illustrate the concept.

"I've always admired Jim Kopp and thought he could pull it off," she said.

She gave Kopp a recording of the 10 Scriabin preludes she was going to play and encouraged him to test the theory. He's spent the last month playing each short piece over and over while letting his paintbrush paint each song's hue.

"You have to listen to what's happening in the piece," Kopp said. "But I tried to stay true to Scriabin's thoughts and colors." The result is 10 monochromatic renderings of each Scriabin piece Stubson will play.

As Stubson plays, Kopp will spotlight the correlating piece. Then, it's up to the audience members to decide if they agree or if they see another color.

"It's kind of a mass audience experiment," Stubson said. "Do they feel the same as Scriabin? Who knows. One thing is sure, though. The ideas of stodgy piano recitals are a thing of the past."