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Bass Hall opens doors for learning experience

By MICHELLE MELENDEZ
Star-Telegram Staff Writer

FORT WORTH — The Bass Performance Hall has never seen so many sneakers.

But the plush burgundy carpet and seats are no worse for the wear, even after about 4,000 fifth-graders from the Fort Worth area tramped through the elegant building yesterday.

The same number are scheduled to come through today as part of the first education program sponsored by Performing Arts Fort Worth, which has promised to bring all Fort Worth grade school students to the hall this year to expose them to music and dance.

As they entered the auditorium, one of the first reactions was: "Big screen TVs! Cool! Let's watch some Nickelodeon!"

About 4,000 Fort Worth area fifth-graders hear a famous pianist as part of an education program.

Others were more impressed with the decor.

"It reminds me of the Titanic," W.J. Turner student Michelle

Mendez said of the candlestick-shaped light fixtures adorning the walls.

As they looked up to the mezzanine and saw some of their classmates, some protested, "Hey, they get to sit up there. No fair!"

After all were seated quietly, the students were treated to a concert by pianist Frederic Chiu, a Cliburn competition favorite who tried his best to be hip and cool. He flew in from his home in Paris for this special two-day engagement, said Sue Buratto, education director of Performing Arts Fort Worth.

The group has pledged \$250,000 for the educational program this year and has established a \$1 million endowment to continue it. The district has allocated \$67,000 for transportation this year.

"We're trying to open them up to a lot of things that they might not otherwise have," Buratto said. "When the Besses opened the hall, that was the plan — to expose the kids as much as we can."

Chiu's rendition of *The William Tell Overture*, better known as the theme from *The Lone Ranger*, was a real show-

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From left, fifth-graders Kia Woods, Jennifer Henry and Cristina Robles examine Bass Hall.