

MAINE SUNDAY TELEGRAM
3 MAY 1992

Audience



Priscilla Morneau at her piano, the playing and teaching of which has been her life's passion.

Staff photo by Jack Nelson

AIN'T SHE GRAND

● She is. So say the many students and colleagues of Priscilla Morneau, in whose name a piano competition begins this week.

By NICK HUMEZ

Prisilla Morneau shuns the limelight. But it won't be easy this week — the Portland Symphony Orchestra's piano competition that begins Wednesday bears her name.

Even though she doesn't like publicity — "No ancient history," she says firmly — in her own quiet way she has had an impact on the music of Portland in her nearly six decades as a pianist.

Morneau has fostered great loyalty. She's admired by professional colleagues for her industry and dedication, praised by students for her enthusiasm for good music of all kinds. Her students, relatives and friends funded both the 1990 and 1992 Priscilla Morneau-PSO piano competitions.

MORNEAU is a small woman, modest and a little shy at first meeting, neat and precise in her personal appearance. An immaculate white hankie is tucked discreetly into her sleeve.

Never married, she lives alone in an apartment in Portland. A few adult students still take their lessons on her baby grand. Morneau, too, still plays, now that a wrist injury from last year has healed.

When Morneau speaks, her French heritage is unmistakable. She grew up bilingual. "My mother was very smart about that," she says.

Her playmates all spoke English, but when she came into the house, "My mother would ignore me until I talked in French. I had to speak French out of self-defense."

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Competition holds keys to prestige

For a young performer, winning a competition and a \$2,500 prize is nothing to sneeze at.

Twenty-one pianists will enter the first of two rounds in the biennial Portland Symphony-Priscilla Morneau piano competition on Wednesday.

The public is invited to hear the final round, starting at 1:30 p.m. Thursday in City Hall Auditorium.

Prizes are \$500 for third place and \$750 for second. The first-prize winner will receive \$2,500 and perform a concerto with the Portland Symphony Orchestra next fall.

For one pianist, the competition will be a homecoming. Lisa Boucher, a native of Brunswick, returns to Maine for the competition from her studies at the Vienna School of Music and Applied Arts in Austria.

The candidates come from all over the United States and beyond. Helen Choi, Cullan Bryant and Stephen Johnson are from New York City. Sarah Takagi is a Bostonian. Catherine York-Norris grew up in Dover, N.H.

Matthew Hagle, at 20 the youngest competitor, lives in Baltimore. Thomas Bishop is from Ohio. Leonard Ostlander from Florida and Gregg Pauley from southern California. Farthest from home is Bernadette Balbus, born in Australia. (She won the silver medal at the San Antonio International Keyboard Competition last year.)

PREVIEW

Portland Symphony Orchestra-Priscilla Morneau piano competition, final round

When: 1:30 p.m. Thursday

Where: City Hall Auditorium

Admission: Free

Call: 773-6128

Three entrants — Caroline Park, June Yujung Choi and Min-Kyung Kwon — are from Korea. Koiko Kasai and Akiko Nakanishi are from Japan. Two — Raja Rahman and Yves Morin — are from Canada. Nada Loutfi is from Lebanon. Aileen Chanco from the Philippines, and Yu-Chia from Taiwan.

The jury will include the Portland Symphony's conductor, Toshiyuki Shimada. His fellow judges, both pianists, will be Frederick Mayer, who has appeared with orchestras worldwide since his Carnegie Hall debut in 1982, and Dolores Frederickson. She has taught for many years at the American Conservatory in Chicago.

There is no admission charge for the final round of the competition. For more information, call the PSO business office, 773-6128.

Nick Humez

C-SPAN so square it's almost hip

● Cable channel, now covering its fourth presidential campaign, is just the fix for political junkies.

By SUSAN BAER
The Baltimore Sun

WASHINGTON — It is the Tsongas of TV channels, so deftly anti-chic it is almost chic, acutely non-hip it is nearly hip.

With no glitz, no polish and commercial breaks, C-SPAN, a television's wondrously droning ubiquitous UN-channel, wallows being everything network television is not.

As the Cable Satellite Political Affairs Network covers its fourth presidential campaign — bringing to 55 million cable households a whisper of a candidate's speech, every "Good-to-see-you" glad-handing session, every pointer of every debate — 13-year-old network has become what one media analyst calls hobby magazine of politics.

But even outside the Washington Beltway, it has become so much part of the culture that trend-a "Saturday Night Live" parody of its broadcasts this year, so a part of the lexicon that one of Bush aide recently referred to as "desirable males of the Republic" as "galoshes and C-SPAN guys."

Along with the network's stay — House and Senate congressional hearings, news speeches, call-in shows, think and conference panels — viewers are receiving a heavy dose, 1,200 hours, of political coverage election year.

On its two channels — an \$18 million budget funded percent of the nation's cable — C-SPAN carries the self-pronounced political junkies have been able to watch without network calls "video verite."

They've seen Iowa senator, former presidential candidate Harkin mutter "sonofabitch" blow his nose (without him) he worked with a construction in Manchester, N.H.

They've watched as former date Tsongas took a dive. Speedo swimsuit at a YMC, smiling Vice President Dan unwittingly waltzed into a c angry voters, as Arkansas G Clinton bit into a sea urchin's factory.

Last November, a C-camera caught Nebraska Sen. Kerrey making an off-color about lesbians and former ma Gov. Edmund G. "Jerry" Kerrey, although network executive not to broadcast the cor since Kerrey did not know being recorded.

These are little things you never get on regular news. Marvin Kalb, who heads the Center on Press, Politics and Policy, "They're not sign news, but they're so insight for junkies, it's mother's milk."

CAMPAIGN COVERAGE not-for-profit network has extensive — it plans gavel-coverage of this summer's elections — that Peggy Connolly, secretary for Tsongas, calls "one of the most significant

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AUDIENCE

GRAND

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BORN INTO a music-loving family in Waterville, she went to school at the Catholic girls' academy there.

"My first piano teacher was one of the nuns," she recalls. While in high school, she was torn between becoming a French teacher or a pianist.

She chose music, she says, because "whenever there was a French class, the students would say, 'Oh, it's French again.' They always hesitated to go to the French class. I wanted no part of that. I didn't want to teach where they didn't want to come. And I couldn't change the system."

She remembers her college days at the New England Conservatory fondly. "I loved Boston," she says. "The educational advantages were great. And such a beautiful city then."

She smiles at memories of spending Friday afternoons at the Boston Symphony for 50 cents.

Her parents, who had moved to Portland, died while she was at the conservatory. So when she first set-

led in Portland, she lived with relatives and began teaching music theory at Westbrook College.

That led to a faculty appointment at St. Joseph's College, in North Windham, the next year. Eventually she became head of its music department. She also taught at the Waynflete School in the 1960s.

IT TOOK 10 YEARS to establish herself as a private piano teacher. Morneault says, but by the 1940s she had many pupils at her studio in the Mechanics' Building in downtown Portland.

Her friend, Ellinor Carter, remembers the studio well. Like Morneault, Carter has been a piano teacher for more than half a century. Both are longtime members of the Rossini Club and the Marston-Kotzschmar Club, for whom they have often performed duo-piano works together.

Carter describes Morneault's studio as "a relatively large room, with high windows onto Congress Street."

It had plenty of space for bookcases and other furnishings — and two grand pianos, one of which faced a wall with a framed picture of St. Cecilia, patroness of music.

"She gives her whole life to this. She's 100 percent dedicated and very demanding. She's interested in having her students do the best they can."

Arthur Borduas, president
Portland Concert Association,
Morneault student

Some of Morneault's former students now have children of their own who have studied with her, too. One former pupil is Chris Lutes, a Portland surgeon; another is his son, Gary, who went on to a master's degree program in linguistics.

As teenagers, Gary Lutes and another Morneault student, Lisa Lefevre, performed as the duo-pianists in a youth concert of Camille Saint-Saens's "Carnival of the Animals" with the Portland Symphony in 1980.

MORNEAULT TAKES gentle pride in her pupils' triumphs — and in her own.

Once she saw what was to have been a televised concert by Van

Cliburn, for whom, at the last moment, an emergency substitution had been made: Lorin Hollander, then only 15 years old.

His performance astonished Morneault.

"We must have that young man here in Portland," she said to her family. So she wrote to Columbia Artists' Management, Hollander's agents, to find out if he was available.

This was no sure thing. Hollander was still in high school, and his parents didn't want him playing too many concerts. But Morneault managed to sign him and got St. Joseph's to sponsor him.

Hollander performed at City Hall Auditorium in the fall of 1960. By that time the young virtuoso was already making regular TV appearances on the Perry Como Show.

His concert was the lead-story on the front page of that day's Evening Express. It was a wild success, the first of many great performances Hollander would give in Maine over the next 25 years.

Another time, Morneault brokered the acquisition of the Steinway grand jointly owned by the Portland Concert Association and the PSO, persuading a local restaurateur, John Martin, to put up the entire sum.

She served for many years on the board of directors of the PCA and is still on its panel of advisers.

THREE OF THE secrets of Morneault's long career are: an eclectic musical palate, great sensitivity to her students' needs, and a tireless discipline.

"She's hard-working and very conscientious," says Ocy Downs, a piano teacher who has known Morneault since the 1930s. "She wants to get as much as she can out of her students."

Arthur Borduas, president of the Portland Concert Association and an ongoing student of Morneault, agrees.

"She gives her whole life to this," he says. "She's 100 percent dedicated and very demanding. She's interested in having her students do the best they can."

Sometimes she has spent hours arranging songs for her students to learn to play — "The American melodies," she explains. "Rogers,

Berlin. They're American composers, and arrangements of them were fun to do."

Though she is quick to encourage talent, Morneault has never tried to force a musical career on a pupil. In fact, she seems proud of those who make a success of something else.

"One of my students, he's working on Liszt now; he's in stocks — a nice young man," she says.

Other present and former students have careers in medicine, law and business administration. But all have caught Morneault's infectious enthusiasm for music.

"She took an interest in what you were doing," said Susan Goldberg, a former Morneault student and now a PCA trustee. "And she's never closed her mind to anything."

Nick Humez, a Portland silversmith, is executive director of the Maine Composers' Forum.

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