

Rice grad's music can be heard on 'Christmas Presence' album

By C. Himes
special writer

This Christmas one of this area's own can be heard on a holiday album.

Concord Records has produced a compact disc featuring Bloomfield Hills native pianist Kevin Gibbs playing his own arrangement of Christmas carols.

The album, "Christmas Presence," is available in local music stores.

Kevin, who is blind, is the son of Dr. William and Patricia Gibbs of Bloomfield Hills.

His parents remember how Kevin, at the age of 2, clambered up on the piano bench and played "Silent Night" using both hands.

Soon the Gibbs realized that they

had a child prodigy. Despite his talent and blindness, they were determined to raise him in a normal fashion with his five brothers and sisters. At age 4, Kevin's formal music lessons with Jerro Wood began. Later he studied with Terri Yamasaki. As time passed and Kevin grew older, he became a student of Mischa Kottler, retired member of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

KEVIN SAYS he learned to play by fixing each sound in his mind. Tapes and discs became helpful later. He served as organist at St. Hugo of the Hills and is in demand to play for weddings in the Birmingham Bloomfield area.

His scrap book abounds with his concert programs, honors and

awards earned during his youth in this area.

One of his finest hours, he says, was playing the warm-up for a Dave Brubeck concert.

Kevin became a protégé of the well known jazz artist George Shearing and they remain close friends. It was Shearing's influence which made Kevin switch from classical music to jazz, he said.

When members of the class of '77 of Brother Rice High School meet informally, that old game, "Have you heard from . . . ? or What happened to . . . ?" is often played - and Kevin Gibbs' name comes up.

Al Fracassa, head football coach for Brother Rice, says that Kevin was admired for his brilliance and tenacity, at someone who refused to allow blindness to become an obstacle.

FRACASSA RECALLS insisting that Kevin run track with his classmates. When Kevin rebelled, Fracassa explained to him that he could not escape life's difficulties by evading them.

He soon had Kevin running two miles a day.

Kevin is currently the pianist at the Park Plaza and Bostonian hotels in Boston.

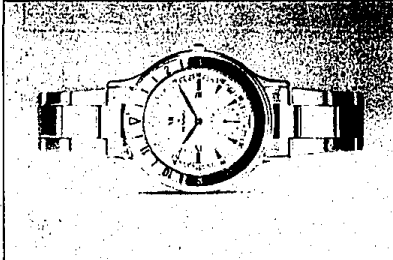
Married for eight years, he and his wife live in a Boston suburb, but will soon move to San Francisco. He is an avid sailor and belongs to the "Courageous Sailing Club" of Newton, Ma.

C. Himes is a Troy resident in her eighties. This is her second article for this newspaper.



Kevin Gibbs now plays piano at two Boston hotels.

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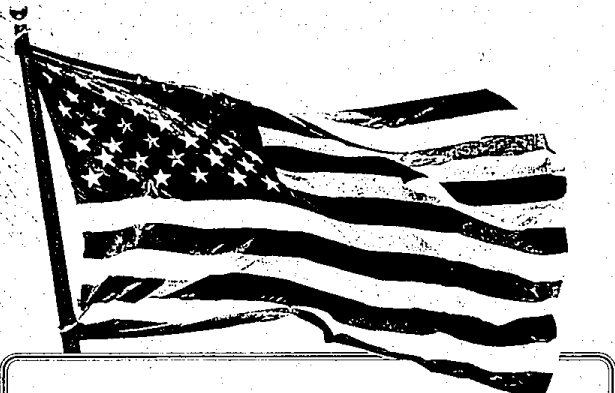


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