

MUSIC

Young pianist would rather play

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Like every other kid, Hal-loween is a much-anticipated holiday for Livonia pianist Joshua Cullen. The 13-year-old University of Michigan freshman would rather be collecting candy with his friends. Instead, he'll be rehearsing Haydn's "Concerto in D major" for a Nov. 1 performance with the Michigan Chamber Symphony Orchestra.

"I'm looking forward to performing with the Michigan Chamber Symphony Orchestra and rehearsal's fun but not Halloween," said Cullen. "Halloween is a once a year thing."

"Which only goes to prove he's still a kid," added Mona Cullen, Joshua's mother.

According to orchestra president Dr. Moon J. Pak, Cullen's young age is not a reflection of his musical skills. That's why the young pianist was chosen to kick off the orchestra's 1997-98 season at Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Hills.

"I'm a music lover," said Dr. Pak, a Bloomfield Hills internist with a practice in Rochester. "Joshua's been known in music circles for some time. He's very young but his performance is very mature."

Michigan Chamber Symphony Orchestra

What: Presents the first concert of its 1997-98 season (an all Haydn program) featuring 13-year-old pianist Joshua Cullen.

When: 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 1.

Where: Temple Beth El, 7400 Telegraph and 14 Mile Road, Bloomfield Hills.

Tickets: \$20 adults, \$10 students/seniors, \$50 for series of three concerts. Call (248) 601-MCSO.

Cullen first stepped onto the local music scene with the Livonia Symphony Orchestra at age eight. In the last five years, he's been a guest pianist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Plymouth Symphony and Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra in Russia.

Founded through financial support by Korean doctors, businessmen and other members of the community in 1996, the Michigan Chamber Symphony Orchestra aims to expand its audience by reaching out beyond

the Korean community with appealing programs featuring artists such as Cullen. After all, everyone can relate to outstanding young talent and the orchestra has a history of supporting it.

The orchestra is under the direction of Dai Uk Lee, a professor at Michigan State University and conductor of the choir at Metropolitan Korean Presbyterian Church in Southfield. Lee made his orchestral debut at age 10 playing a Mozart piano concerto with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. After a successful early career in Korea, Lee studied at the Juilliard School with Sasha Gordinzki on a scholarship.

"The Koreans are big in classical music," said Dr. Pak. "There are many symphony orchestras in Korea. Korean people in Michigan are eager to have Lee here. So we initiated the orchestra. We thought maybe if we would support a chamber music program we hopefully could achieve national prominence in collaboration with Lee."

Raising a prodigy

Cullen is studying music history, theory and chamber music and loving it just as Lee did at an early age. He said being the

youngest full-time student at the University of Michigan doesn't bother him because the other students treat him like a little brother.

Just like other kids, Cullen likes to ride his bike when he's not practicing or at school. He'd like to roller blade but father Calvin and University of Michigan professor of piano Arthur Greene forbid it fearing he might break an arm.

So how does a parent nurture music in one so young without dominating and discouraging them?

"What I understand from other parents is they're always after their children to practice just like I am with the two younger children, Catherine, age 4 and Christian, 7," said Mona.

"We never had to ask Joshua to practice. He's always been very disciplined, a perfectionist. I had to pull him away and tell him go outside and play. We didn't ask if he wanted to play piano, Joshua asked to play the piano. His father had given him a Casio keyboard for his birthday. As soon as he heard things he could play them. It was difficult to find a teacher because they don't usually take five-year-olds for private lessons."



Young artist: Pianist Joshua Cullen, a 13-year-old freshman at the University of Michigan School of Music, performs with the Michigan Chamber Symphony Orchestra on Nov. 1.

After Cullen earns master and doctorate degrees in music, he plans to concertize and teach. He may even return to perform with the Michigan Chamber Symphony Orchestra on a regular basis. After all, the 20 to 40 member nonprofit orchestra aims to present the highest professional caliber performances of innovative and exciting programs to audiences in the Detroit area.

"When people think of Korea

they associate with the Korean War but we want them to associate the orchestra with the Korean community's desire to express a commitment to contribute to the cultural life of its adopted country," said Dr. Pak. "Even at the onset never contemplated this being a Korean organization. We have a mandate to expand our support base. We want to build community orientation instead of ethnic."

'Magic Flute' brings sweet music to MOT

Michigan Opera Theatre presents "The Magic Flute" 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 26, Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway at Madison Avenue, Detroit. Tickets range from \$18 to \$95, call (313) 874-7464 or (248) 645-6866.

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

"The Magic Flute" is still best known as the comic opera that effectively put Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in his grave. Despite the show's success, the master composer died within months of its debut and was buried in a pauper's field.

If you believe that Mozart was "killed off his nut toward the end, this Egyptian fantasy could be entered as proof positive. The

OPERA

production at the Detroit Opera House captures the whimsy and enchantment, if not the all-out manic inspiration, of its famous creator.

"The Magic Flute" opens with Prince Tamino nearly vanquished by a fire-breathing dragon, that is until a trio of maidens save him. Soon he meets bird-catcher Papageno. They embark together, often by hot air balloon (painted with Mozart's image), on a quest to save Pamina, kidnapped daughter of the Queen of the Night.

Once they do hook up, the

lovers must prove their worthiness through a series of tests. The show has long been cited for its message of spiritual enlightenment, a reference to Mozart's own beliefs as a Freemason.

Though the impassioned singing tries hard to evoke emotion and pathos, it's difficult to see "The Magic Flute" as more than a lark. For people like myself, who aren't Opera Theatre regulars, it's a great introduction to the beauty of the form without the heavy aftertaste.

The Maurice Sendak set for the current production recalls "Where the Wild Things Are" as much as the Nile, though I couldn't help wishing that it had been even more opulent and surreal.

real.

The costuming is vintage late 1700s, while the more fantastical creatures come off a little (and I suppose appropriately) moth-eaten. The dragon looks more H.R. Puff 'N' Stuff than "Jurassic Park," the ancient mask-wearing lions could be refugees from a grade school pageant.

There are several musical highlights, most involving MOT newcomer Theresa Santiago as Pamina. If co-star Joseph Wolverson was a little stiff, it's not unusual. Is it just me or does every damsel and wandering youth in opera look like someone's mom and dad?

The audience favorite, however, remains Frank Hernandez as Papageno, a comic counterpart to Tamino who falls miserably during each of his friend's tests of faith. He's so watchable because it's him, far more than Tamino, that most of us can relate to.

From the low, low bass of Kevin Belle High Priest Sarastro to soprano Elizabeth Carter's Queen of the Night, all of the actors in "The Magic Flute" outdo themselves with larger-than-life portrayals. Even a lecherous Monostatos (John C. Pierce) evokes more laughs than hisses as he weakly tries to rav-

age the kidnapped Pamina.

Monitors strategically placed throughout the theater provide subtitles during the songs; even though the German opera has already been translated to English by the singers. Still, I suppose it's a helpful crutch.

The show invariably drags in the second half, but the surprises in the enchanting score (like the reprise of Papageno's magic bells) keeps even the squirmiest audience members attentive.

Shows like "The Magic Flute" prove that Mozart is alive indeed and residing at the The Detroit Opera Theatre.

ART BEAT

Send items for consideration in Art Beat to Frank Provenzano, arts reporter, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc. 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009, or fax (248) 644-1314.

THEATRE OPENING DELAYED

The Birmingham Village Players has rescheduled their opening show, "Rehearsal for Murder," which was expected to open this weekend. Instead, the play will be performed Jan. 15-25.

Meanwhile, Village Players will open their 1997-98 season Friday, Dec. 5 with "Sweet and Hot."

The postponement was caused by "an unexpected construction delay at the theater, which is currently undergoing major renovations and new construction."

"Village Players' season includes five shows. Season ticket price for all shows is \$50. Individual show tickets are \$12 for musicals and \$10 for other shows."

SISTER ART

Ann Arbor artist Cheryl Dawdy, a member of the singing group The Chenille Sisters, will exhibit her two-dimensional framed collage art work in a one-woman show at Borders Books & Music, 30995 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. Call (248) 737-3980.

Dawdy will be on hand to answer questions and talk about her work during an opening reception 2-4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 1.

In her travels around the world with The Chenille Sisters, Dawdy gathered a collection of antique postcards, from which she constructs interesting and beautiful collages, which are framed and can be hung on the wall as if they were paintings.

continuing through Friday, Oct. 31 at the Livonia Civic Center Library Fine Arts Gallery.

Ten percent of the sales go to the Barbart, Ann Karmans Cancer Institute in memory of loved ones who died from cancer. Exhibit hours are 9 a.m. to 9

p.m. Monday to Thursday; until 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday; and 1-4 p.m. Sunday.

The Livonia Civic Center Library Fine Arts Gallery is at 32777 Five Mile Road (east of Farmington Road).

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