

THE FARMINGTON COMMUNITY CENTER
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ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Author unravels mystery of two Christmases

Cynthia Reynolds still tramps through the woods every year before Christmas to cut down a tree to decorate for the holidays. It's part of the tradition passed down from her parents years ago in snowy New England. After chopping down an evergreen, well actually more than one, her family hung hand-made ornaments on the branches and then added a final touch - a star on the very top.

The tradition of decorating trees is just one of the mysteries Reynolds unravels in her new book *S is for Star: A Christmas Alphabet*, which she'll sign today at Jacobson's in Livonia. Winifred, an English missionary later known as St. Boniface, used the evergreen tree as a sign sent from God to pagan German tribesmen 1,200 years ago. Winifred had cut down the pagans' massive oak tree worshipped as a symbol of the god Thor. The evergreen, like a miracle, sprang up in its place. Centuries later German religious leader Martin Luther was the first to light candles on a tree. They symbolized the stars in heaven. The star in the east that guided the three Wise Men to bring gifts to a newborn baby in a manger is what inspired Reynolds to write her book about the two Christmases she grew to know in New England and later when living in the Midwest and on the east coast.

What: Cynthia Reynolds signs copies of her new book
When: 1:20-3:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 2
Where: Jacobson's in Laurel Park Place, Six Mile and Newburgh, Livonia.

"I had the idea since (I was) a kid that there were two Christmases with Baby Jesus and Santa and mistletoe. Then when I had children they had questions," said Reynolds from her home in Scio Township halfway between Ann Arbor and Detroit. "I thought I was the only one who had those questions why there were two different Christmases. I found that all traditions related to the baby in the manger. Gift giving goes back to the Wise Men, feasting is rooted in the Jewish High Holy Days.

"My dad's family was German, mom's was from New England. There were four girls in the family and we'd usually come home with six trees because we couldn't decide, then give some of them to the neighbors. My mother was the original Martha Stewart. She'd decorate every inch of the house and we'd exchange gifts. Everything goes back to the roots in the Bible story of that first Christmas."

Reynolds combines verses from the Bible story with holiday customs from around the world which she researched in old books inherited from her grandparents and parents who were educators. Her original text was three times longer than the published book.

"We always seemed to move into areas with ethnic flavor, Dutch areas of New Jersey, Eastern European areas in Omaha. My life has been a

Please see EXPRESSIONS, C2



A is for angel: Cynthia Reynolds reveals holiday traditions from around the world that celebrate the birth of the Christ Child in her book *S is for Star: A Christmas Alphabet*.

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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When the curtain rises on *The Nutcracker* ballet Dec. 8, Cameron Groenewoud will finally realize her dream of dancing the character Clara in Peter Tchaikovsky's magical ballet. Groenewoud first aspired to the role at the age of 4 upon seeing the Plymouth-Canton Ballet Company's production. Eight years later she joins the 70-member company as the young girl dreaming about a land of sugar and sweets as she dances to the music of the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra.

"It's like a dream come true," said Groenewoud, a seventh-grade student at West Middle School in Plymouth. "I always wanted to be part of it - the magic kingdom where the Nutcracker takes her to the castle and shows her everything. It's a magical, fantasy world."

Groenewoud especially likes partnering with Nutcracker James Payne of Northville. It's something she never had the opportunity to do during nine years of studies at Bunny Sanford's School of Dance in Livonia. There's more partnering this year in general because of the addition of six new boys to the production, which follows ETA Hoffman's story *The Nutcracker and Mouse King*. Guest dancers Amanda Jarman of the Cincinnati Ballet and David Palmer, a member of Maximum Dance Company, partner as the Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier.

"It kind of makes you feel like you're floating, but you have to trust your partner," said Groenewoud, who'd like to make dance her life. As it is she's at Bunny Sanford's school six evenings a week learning new steps and teaching them to younger dancers.

"I'd like to do it again next year if I don't outgrow the part."

Even if she does grow too tall for the role of Clara, company artistic director Dawn Greene thinks Groenewoud could one day dance the role of Snow Queen, or the ultimate Nutcracker dream - the Sugar Plum Fairy.

"I tell all the children to learn all the roles in case someone gets sick," said Greene, who choreographed new Spanish and Arabian numbers for this year's ballet.

Megan DeShong didn't have to learn a new role for *The Nutcracker* this holiday season, but she did have to switch productions. For the last three years, she played Clara with the Rockettes at the Fox Theatre in



Enchanting story: Megan DeShong is Clara in the Livonia Symphony Orchestra and Dearborn Ballet Theatre *Nutcracker*. DeShong previously danced the role for three years with the Rockettes at the Fox Theatre.

Detroit but grew too tall. She continues in the role with Dearborn Ballet Theatre and the Livonia Symphony Orchestra Dec. 8 at Churchill High School in Livonia. Guest artists are Jennifer Provins and Karl Von

Rabennau of the Milwaukee Ballet and Livonia Churchill High School Choralation. Their first performances took place Thanksgiving weekend at the new Ford Community and Performing Arts Center in Dearborn

Nutcracker Ballets

■ Livonia Symphony Orchestra with the Dearborn Ballet Theatre, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 8, at Churchill High School Auditorium, 8900 Newburgh, north of Joy Road, Livonia. Tickets \$16, \$10 students/children. Call (734) 425-4855

■ Plymouth Symphony Orchestra with Plymouth-Canton Ballet Company, 11 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 8, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 9, in Plymouth Salem High School Auditorium, 46181 Joy Road, Canton. Tickets \$18, \$10 children. Call (734) 451-2112

where the joint production filled 900 of the 1200 seats.

"It was like a professional show," said DeShong, who began dancing at age 4 and at age 14 is a ninth-grade student at Dearborn High School. "It's fun. I do a lot of dancing and have to act a lot, too. It was so great."

Artistic director Loni Lane says that's because she expanded the size of the company from 100 to 160 to fill the larger stage at the performing arts center. Dancers from Livonia, Westland, Canton, Plymouth, Redford, Dearborn, Birmingham and Pontiac were cast for the parts.

"There's a new Waltz of Flowers with 28 dancers instead of 14," said Lane. "We have all new choreography, a lot more little boys, and a lot of new costumes, scenery and props."

"Our Nutcracker explains the story, makes it more understanding for children. It's very animated. The children (as young as age 4) have a big role. They do a lot of the acting and are involved in almost every scene. The mice are adults, huge 6-foot mice modeled after those in the New York City Ballet. They're whimsical, not scary, but cute mice. We have a huge box filled with baby dolls who are wound up and dance."

And like Groenewoud and DeShong someday one of the young dancing dolls will grow into her dream of playing Clara.



Holiday classic: Cameron Groenewoud plays Clara in *The Nutcracker* production by the Plymouth-Canton Ballet Company and the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra.

CONCERT

Chamber Music Society series brings notables to town

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Lois Beznos urges anyone wanting to hear internationally-known pianist Daniel Barenboim perform Chopin and Beethoven sonatas Monday, Dec. 10 not to wait even though seating has been added to the main floor of Orchestra Hall. Tickets for the Chamber Music Society of Detroit program are selling fast.

Part of the reason is because Barenboim hasn't appeared in the metro Detroit area for 37 years but anyone with an interest in classical music knows of his extensive performance experience as a pianist and conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. It was just last year he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his debut as a pianist at age 7 in Buenos Aires with a series of recitals at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

"Daniel Barenboim is acknowledged throughout the world," said Beznos, president of the Chamber Music Society of Detroit based in Farmington

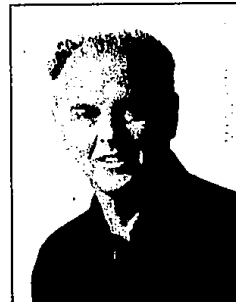
Hills. "His reputation as a concert pianist spans continents. I heard him play Chicago and at Carnegie Hall in New York City last season where he did the whole series of Beethoven piano concertos. He is a genius at what he does. Audiences don't have an opportunity to hear him in recital. It's a great rarity. The moment we announced the concert last spring people started to buy tickets."

Originally last spring, a Community Dialogue on Peace in the Middle East was to be held in conjunction with the recital by Barenboim who's held music workshops for Jewish and Arab students so they could communicate with each other. Sadly, it was discontinued after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 but Beznos hopes to try to bring members of the Arab and Jewish community together in the future in a similar program.

In the meantime, the Chamber Music Society of Detroit presents the pianist who made his American debut in New York in 1957 with Leopold Stokowski conducting.

Born to parents of Jewish-Russian descent in Buenos Aires in 1942, Barenboim was inspired early to become a pianist by his mother who gave him lessons from age 5. Over the years, he's concertized throughout the U.S., Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. As a conductor he's led the New Philharmonia Orchestra in London, Orchestre de Paris and Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1991. He was named general music director of the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 1992. And the list goes on.

Barenboim's credentials as an acclaimed musician are typical of performers presented in the Chamber Music Society of Detroit series. Upcoming concerts include programs by The Shanghai Quartet Saturday, Jan. 19 and violinist Joshua Bell Thursday, Feb. 7. Beznos credits sponsors such as Comerica Private Banking and Scott Shapiro Furniture for helping to secure some of the finest performers in classical music today.



In recital: Daniel Barenboim performs a program of sonatas by Chopin and Beethoven.

Please See CHAMBER, C2