

Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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Pianist doesn't forget her friends

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

STAFF PHOTO

Cynthia Raim (left), concert pianist, and Barbara Woolf, regular pianist at Birmingham Unitarian Church, met earlier this fall to talk about Raim's upcoming concert at the church.

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The New York Times called pianist Cynthia Raim "a musician of intelligence and judgment." The Philadelphia Inquirer praised her "impeccable technique, bright but not brittle . . . delicately colored."

Saturday, Nov. 11, the native Detroit will bring her critically acclaimed musicianship home to the first concert of the annual Birmingham Unitarian Church Festival of Music.

"I'm there to make music, not a show. I'm not what you would call a flamboyant artist," Raim said of her own interpretive style.

She prefers letting the music take the limelight in her interpretations, rather than resorting to keyboard pyrotechnics that draw attention to the pianist at the expense of the music, she said.

"I enjoy playing a wide repertoire," she said of her conscious decision not to become musically pigeonholed.

When asked which composer she plays best, Raim defers to the critics.

"It has often been said that I have an exceptional ability to be equally convincing in various modes."

Critics frequently say she plays Mozart with intelligent clarity, Rachmaninoff with lyrical fluidity and Prokofiev with passionate power, showing she's equally attuned to classical, romantic and modern composers.

WHEN RAIM PLAYS at the Birmingham Unitarian Church Festival of Music, she'll be returning not only to her home area, but also to the place and to the people who believed in her talent when she was a teenager attending Cass Tech High School, studying under Mischa Kotter and playing Sunday mornings at the church.

During those fledgling years of her career, a group of music enthusiasts at the church believed so staunchly in her talent that they organized a benefit recital for her.

Proceeds from the recital she played during her last year of high school, plus donations from church members, bought Raim her first grand piano — a Steinway A, the 6-foot-4 little-brother of grand. Now she plays only on Steinway pianos, and Steinway has given her its unsolicited nod of approval by endorsing Cynthia Raim as an official Steinway artist.

On Nov. 11, she'll return to the church on Woodward, Bloomfield Hills, to play, appropriately, the first public concert on the new Bir-

mingham Unitarian Church Steinway grand piano, recently bought from Hammel Music through the generosity of Shirley and Ernie Hoen.

OVER THE years Raim has kept alive not only her ties to Steinway pianos, but her ties to the people of Birmingham Unitarian Church who fostered her early career and believed in her future. She has gone on to win the coveted Clara Haskil International Competition in Switzerland and the Pro Musica Award of Philadelphia.

She regularly gives concerts in the United States, playing both as a soloist in such prestigious halls as the Kennedy Center and with symphony orchestras in Boston, Rochester, Detroit, St. Paul and Philadelphia. An active chamber musician, she also appears with the Guarneri String Quartet, with the Vermeer, and in duo recitals with soprano Bentita Valente.

"When I'm feeling a bit dry in the well of inspiration, there is nothing like making music with people who excite me," she said, explaining the advantages of doing both solo and chamber concerts. "I come back with more enthusiasm and greater insight."

In Europe she won accolades in Prague, Hamburg, Lausanne and Vienna. Her career has climbed steadily since she left Detroit after high school to attend the School of the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. There she studied under Rudolph Serkin and Mieczyslaw Horszowski, who honed her skills at "shaping" music and built on the fine technical training by Detroit's grand old man of piano, Mischa Kotter.

WHENEVER SHE'S in town, she tries to visit her aunt and uncle in Livonia and to see Kotter, with whom she began studying when she was 6 years old.

"At the time, he wasn't taking anyone below 12 or 13," she said. "When we went to ask him to recommend a teacher, he agreed to take me on himself."

"As far as a solid foundation in playing, I couldn't have done better with Mr. Kotter," she said of her early training.

WHEN SHE was 2, she began sounding out tunes in the old basement upright in the Rains' Oak Park house.

"At the time my brother was taking piano lessons and hating it," she said. "My mother heard a tune coming from downstairs and called my brother. He shouted from somewhere else, 'I'm not playing it!'"

At 5, she began learning to read notes and at age 9, she was the youngest pianist ever to play a concerto with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

When she was 6 or 7 she remembers hearing a pianist play Tchaikovsky with Leonard Bernstein at a Detroit Symphony Orchestra Young People's Concert.

"I looked at the pianist and exclaimed, 'That's what I want to do!'"

DESPITE HER PRECOCIOUS musical beginning, Raim is uncomfortable being called a child prodigy, she said.

"I knew I was doing different things that other kids my age weren't doing. In some way it was exciting and satisfying to have people pay attention and this (music) happened to be the reason. Those horrors . . . you hear of kids being forced to practice six hours a day. It was never like that. I loved playing the piano. Practice for the most part was voluntary."

Nowadays she practices five to six hours most days, but doesn't hesitate to take an occasional day off R and R. She's addicted to chocolate and loves the gadgetry of electronic toys such as her stereo system, TV and VCR. She likes spending free time with her friends.

When she's in Detroit, Raim roots for the Tigers out of youthful loyalty, even if they're losing. She enjoys movies and loved the film "Field of Dreams" because it was steeped in the mystique of baseball. Music remains her mainstay and her passion.

HER CONCERT will begin at 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 11, at the Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward Avenue at Lone Pine. Tickets at the door are \$10 general admission and \$7 students and seniors. Call 647-2380 for information.

The Birmingham Unitarian Church Choir will welcome the holidays with Vivaldi's Gloria in a free concert at 8 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 10.

Laura Larson and Kerskin Alvin will play as a flute and harp duo at 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 21, and classical guitarist Michael Stockdale will close the Festival of Music in a cabaret concert Sunday, Feb. 25. Hammel Music financed the concert.

Baroque expert brings series to home state

Baroque and classical violinist Richard Luby will return to his home area for three concerts, "Richard Luby & Friends" at Cranbrook.

The series, featuring 17th and 18th century chamber music on original instruments, begins at 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 10, with "The Chamber Trio," performing works by Haydn and Beethoven in the Guild Hall, Christ Church Cranbrook. The performers are: Luby, violin; John Gibbons, fortepiano; and Laura Blustein, classical cello.

Luby said his interest in this area of music began when he was a graduate student at Yale University. "The difference (in the violin) is strictly how it is set up to sound," he said adding that the basic instrument is the same. "What's really different is the way you play it. The Baroque violin doesn't sound out as far, but gives finer detail and texture."



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— Richard Luby

A novel approach to intrigue

NEXT WEEK, Livonia writer S.K. Wolf's suspense-thriller, "The Harbinger Effect" (Simon & Schuster, \$18.95), will arrive at area bookstores.

It'll be a very special day for Wolf (a.k.a. Sarah Wolf Shoemaker), made especially sweet by the fact that the book — just her second published novel — has been designated an alternate selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club and a main selection of the Mysterious Book Club, a division of BOMC.

Her new novel, her first, "Long Chain of Death," was published by Walker & Co. in 1987. It is a tale of intrigue and derring-do. It centers on the defection of one Yuri Klebanoff, an important Soviet citizen who not only happens to be the son of the editor-in-chief of Pravda, but is also the grandson of a former Soviet premier.

He is aided in his attempt at defection by an ex-Peace Corps volunteer, Molly Davison, who, though short on a knowledge of international affairs, is long on spirit and quick wit.

The action moves from Africa to Rome to Greece to points beyond, with stakes growing ever higher, and the plot thickening considerably because of one curious fact: Along with the KGB, U.S. operatives are also working to sabotage the defection.

Wolf, 53, has lived in Greece and Turkey, and traveled extensively in the Middle East. She wrote "The Harbinger Effect" over a three-year period, starting in 1985, while working as a research assistant to the director of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Much of it was put together. In fact, during spare moments she could grab on lunch and coffee breaks.

Ideas, outlines, characters and possible plots for the story had been rattling around inside Wolf's imagination since the early 70s, however.

At the time, living in Greece with husband Kent, she happened to meet the CIA agent who had "escorted" Josef Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, to the United States in 1956. She fell in love with her and became her confidante in 1976. Hearing the accounts of the experience, the then-aspiring writer was highly intrigued.

"Writers hear things like that and immediately begin to embellish, of course," Wolf said.

Over time, she kept thinking about the story. As a result, some time dur-



Livonia mystery author Sarah Wolf reads over her publisher's contract as her cat, Rocky, sniffs up some sun. Wolf will be guest speaker at the Livonia Friends of the Library meeting at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 8, in Civic Center Library on Five Mile Road. The meeting is open to the public.

JIM JAGDFELD/Detroit Free Press

any "secretive" information, she said. "I critiqued those first two chapters very closely, so that I was confident the chapters were really accurate, even though I'd never witnessed any of that first-hand," Wolf said.

WHILE SHE conducts some of her research for her novels via personal contacts (she once learned, from her son's high school physics teacher, how to put together a bomb, and recently happened upon a held weapon's part — at a church service), she's quick to point out that more than 90 percent of it is done at her local library.

book break

Victoria Diaz

Author to sign books

S.K. Wolf will be available to sign books and meet readers noon to 1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 19, at the Metro

News Center, southwest corner of Telegraph and Maple, Bloomfield Township.