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Obedient Student

By: Susan Van Dongen , TIMEOFF

Pulitzer Prize-winning pianist Yehudi Wyner, an adherent of the Taubman Approach, will perform at the Golandsky International Piano Festival in Princeton.

Composer Yehudi Wyner wasn't sure how he would be received by piano pedagogue Edna Golandsky. At age 60, he was concerned about how aging would impact his performance skills and thought he would try to see how the Taubman Approach — taught by Ms. Golandsky — could strengthen and improve his playing.

"I didn't know if Edna could teach an old dog new tricks," Mr. Wyner says.

Through friends and a colleague, he'd become intrigued with Dorothy Taubman's method for the piano, enough to attend master classes Ms. Taubman was giving at the 92nd Street Y in New York. Later, he would seek out Ms. Golandsky for private lessons.

"I was certainly growing older," Mr. Wyner says, speaking from his home in Cambridge, Mass. "I was also a professional pianist who played a lot of chamber music, but was also involved in composing. Because of this, I found that I couldn't practice every day, and sometimes let the piano go for months. Then I would need a strenuous regimen of exercises and to get back in shape. It occurred to me that as I grew older, this was going to be less and less effective.

"Then I heard Dorothy say, 'If you learn the proper way of playing, then you're always ready, you don't have to warm up. You can go right to the piano and play,'" he continues. "That sounded like magic. What really convinced me was the fact that Dorothy said talented young children could play enormous literature — Chopin and Rachmaninoff — without an adult's strength. How could they do that? I had always thought mature formation and strength was needed for proper piano playing. The idea that there was a method so natural really appealed to me."

Mr. Wyner launched his studies of the Taubman Approach more than 15 years ago. In addition to rejuvenating his piano technique, the learning experience energized his teaching career, giving him a whole new way of relating to his students.

This has been an especially rewarding year for Mr. Wyner. After a long and prolific career, the soft-spoken native of Canada was named as the winner of the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for music composition for his piano concerto *Chiavi in Mano*, premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2005.

Fresh from this professional and artistic triumph, Mr. Wyner will be one of the distinguished guest lecturers and world-class performers at the 2006 Golandsky Institute Summer Symposium and International Piano Festival. The event will return to Princeton University July 16 to 22, with eight symposium presentations and six festival concerts by world-class musicians.

Symposium presentations feature lectures, demonstrations and panel discussions by Golandsky Institute faculty and guests, including author Sandra Rosenblum, Harvard University's Christopher Hasty, Edward Bilous of the Juilliard School, Thomas Bagwell of Mannes College of Music and Princeton University's Barbara White.

In addition, the Piano Festival spotlights international talent playing 20th and 21st century music, reflecting the Golandsky Institute's commitment to new music. Performers include rising star Kuok-Wai Lio, Ilya Itin, Janice Weber and Art Song Now. The festival finale will be a jazz performance by Matt Herskovitz and the Herskovitz Rozenblatt Project.

On July 21, Mr. Wyner will accompany soprano Dominique Labelle in a program of Debussy, Saint-Saens and Reynaldo Hahn, as well as his own work, *Second Madrigal (Voices of Women)*, and will give a pre-concert talk. On July 20, he'll also be part of a panel discussion on contemporary music, along with Mr. Hasty, Mr. Bilous and Ms. White.

Speaking about the Pulitzer, Mr. Wyner is self-deprecating and very grateful to be taking in such an outpouring of support from friends, family and longtime followers of his artistry. He says he was "surprised that so many people were paying attention," to his work, since he has never taken a particularly aggressive approach to getting his compositions "out there."

"I feel that I've always been relatively obscure — I did my work and didn't have a goal in mind," Mr. Wyner says. "I want my music to be heard, enjoyed and if someone is so inclined, to be performed. I don't want it to be performed out of some kind of obligation."

Composing is as solitary an artform as writing or painting, so he is doubly pleased to know people are listening. Apparently acquaintances from 50 years ago have even reached out to congratulate Mr. Wyner.

"Most of the greetings were generous and genuine, it's been a great joy," he says. "There are rumblings that (the Pulitzer) will lead to more opportunities, but just rumblings so far. What I hope to have happen is that there will be a wider consciousness of my music, more people will want to hear it and this will push forward to more performances and perhaps commissions for new works."

Mr. Wyner was born in 1929 in Western Canada, but grew up in New York City. His father, Lazar Weiner, was the pre-eminent composer of Yiddish art songs as well as a notable creator of liturgical music for the modern synagogue. He received his early training as a pianist and composer and after graduating from the Juilliard School, went on to study at Yale and Harvard universities with composers Richard Donovan, Walter Piston and Paul Hindemith.

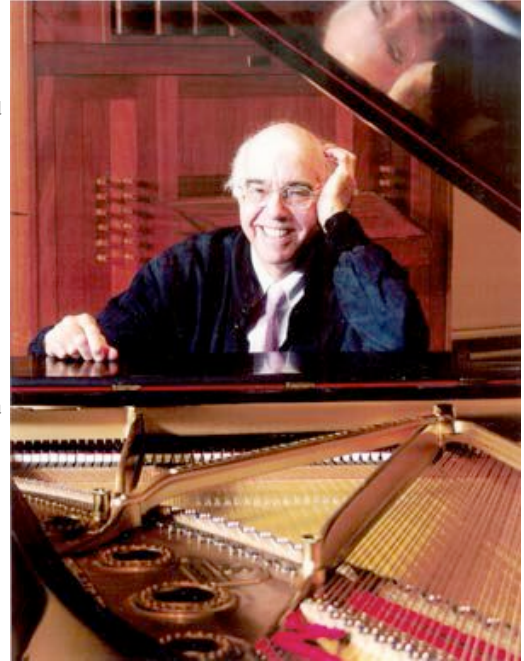
Mr. Wyner has had an active career as a solo pianist, chamber musician, collaborator with notable singers and instrumentalists, director of two opera companies, conductor of numerous chamber and vocal ensembles and as a teacher.

As a composer, he's created a body of more than 60 works including compositions for orchestra, chamber ensembles, solo voice and solo instruments, and music for the theater, as well as liturgical services for worship. Many compositions were created for his wife, Susan Davenny Wyner.

His piano concerto, *Chiavi in mano*, was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and was performed by soloist Robert Levin with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2005. Currently Mr. Wyner is completing a violin concerto for Daniel Stepner.

It was through his longtime association with the Tanglewood Institute that he first learned of the Taubman Approach. Not long after, Mr. Wyner sought out master classes with Ms. Taubman, he was stopping Ms. Golandsky on the streets of New York asking to take lessons.

"I approached Edna several times and she was too busy at first," Mr. Wyner says. "But I kept pursuing her and finally she had time, so I started taking systematic lessons. It was fascinating. I was put back into the position of being a beginner, technically speaking. But it was not just about being a beginner,



Yehudi Wyner

but being a receptive, obedient student. You get to a point in your life when you think you know a lot. But I learned quickly to keep my mouth shut and do what I was told.

"Interestingly, this also had a wonderful effect on my teaching," he continues. "I had a revelation about what it felt like to be a student again. The whole experience was new, replenishing and liberating because it felt so good."

The 2006 Golandsky Institute Summer Symposium and International Piano Festival includes Pulitzer Prize-winner Yehudi Wyner as part of a panel discussion on contemporary music, McCormick Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, July 20, 4:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$15. Mr. Wyner will accompany soprano Dominique Labelle, Taplin Auditorium, Princeton University, Princeton, 8 p.m. Pre-concert chat, 7 p.m. Tickets cost \$20. The Golandsky Institute International Piano Festival runs July 16-22. Festival passes cost \$100. Tickets for the individual symposiums cost \$15. Combo passes cost \$200 (six concerts and eight symposium presentations). For information, call (877) 343-3434. On the Web: www.golandskyinstitute.org



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