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What's New in Princeton & Central New Jersey?

Reprinted from the July 8, 2009, edition of U.S. 1 newspaper

88 Keys in Heaven: A Week of Piano Concerts
by Elaine Strauss

For the seventh time the Golandsky Institute returns to Princeton offering participants a week-long immersion in healthy piano playing, following the practices of Dorothy Taubman, and offering the Princeton community a series of evening concerts. Edna Golandsky, founder and artistic director of the organization, and a Taubman student, has turned Taubman's discoveries into a year-round worldwide enterprise.

This year the Institute in Princeton, which takes place from Sunday, July 12, to Saturday, July 18, has invited a group of Princeton University faculty and recent graduates to collaborate in a high-profile concert in which Sergei Prokofiev's "Music for Athletes" will be played for the first time.

Princeton professor Simon Morrison discovered the piece in a Moscow archive while researching his 2009 book "The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years." Pianist Ilya Itin, Golandsky Institute faculty member, performs the 20-minute work in a concert on Friday, July 17, in Richardson Auditorium. Morrison opens the evening with a lecture-demonstration about the creation of the piece and its disappearance before it could be published.

The July 17 program, "Prokofiev Old and New: From Beloved to Unknown," involves more than a half dozen Princetonians. Choreographer Jennie Scholick, Princeton '09, has developed a dance component to "Music for Athletes," to be performed by five recent Princeton graduates who are now professional dancers in New York City. Princeton poet Paul Muldoon narrates "Peter and the Wolf." Itin performs the original piano version of "Peter and the Wolf," which preceded the better-known orchestral version. He also plays Prokofiev's Sonata No. 7.

Princeton's Adrienne Sirken, Golandsky Institute creative partner, produced the program. She notes that, unlike other Golandsky concerts, the Prokofiev program begins at 7:30 in order to give Morrison time to talk about the "Athletes" piece. She also points out that the Prokofiev concert takes place in Richardson, rather than in the smaller Taplin auditorium because Itin's popularity demands a larger space. "Itin's concerts sell out," she says in a telephone conversation. "There was a near-riot at his concert in Taplin last year because there wasn't enough space for people who wanted to attend."

"For me 'Music for Athletes' is particularly exciting," Itin says. "I've played a lot of music by Prokofiev since I was a kid. It was fascinating to learn something by a composer that you think you know inside out, and to find unfamiliar phrases.

"There were a few spots in 'Music for Athletes' that Prokofiev quoted in other works, but the entire piece was never performed," Itin says. "It was a treasure hunt to find the familiar parts. The piece was intended to be orchestrated. I had to make minor adjustments for it to be playable on the piano."

"Music for Athletes" was intended for a 1939 Soviet spectacle involving 30,000 athletes performing paramilitary gymnastics. The designer of the event was Prokofiev's friend, Vsevolod Meyerhold, the well-known Russian director. In the bad graces of the Kremlin at a time when terrorism was official policy, Meyerhold was arrested as he was putting finishing touches on the spectacle. He disappeared. And so did Prokofiev's score — until Morrison unearthed it in 2006.

The catalyst for its performance on July 17, Adrienne Sirken, is a Princeton pianist and Taubman-certified private teacher. Delighted with the Morrison survey course she was auditing, she invited him to lecture at the Golandsky Institute, she says. When he mentioned casually the never-heard "Music for Athletes" she immediately thought of Itin as a possible performer.

"Morrison's secondary passion," Sirken says, "is dance and choreography." He brought

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choreographer Scholick into the picture. Besides earning a certificate in European cultural studies, Scholick, a comparative literature major, earned a certificate at Princeton's dance center, the Lewis Center for the Arts.

Working together, Sirken, Morrison, and Itin fashioned the Prokofiev program. Itin was eager to play the Prokofiev Seventh Sonata, which he has never performed before. He gained a new understanding of the piece by looking at Morrison's copy of the manuscript. "There were no major differences between the manuscript and the published version," Itin says. "A few changes in dynamics. It was thrilling to see that the manuscript looked so finished. The handwriting was almost like Mozart's. It gave me an insight into Prokofiev's thinking. It was like having a magnifying glass."

Itin was born in Ekatarinburg, Russia, in 1967, and began playing the piano at age four. He graduated from the Moscow Conservatory with highest honors. While attending the conservatory, he took second place in the Russian National Rachmaninoff Competition.

In 1990, at age 23, he came to the United States on a six-day visa for the William Kapell competition in Maryland. "I was planning to come just for the competition," he says. "I won second prize, which was a little unexpected, and I got engagements, and the possibility to stay in the U.S. The prospect was very exciting. What amazed me most was that people in the U.S. were so hospitable, so supportive, and so helpful. I felt right at home." Itin may have invited the American welcome. He describes himself as being "curious" and as "having an adventurous bone in me."

He entered the Casadesus Competition in 1991 in Cleveland, Ohio, and won first prize. In 1996 he won first place in the triennial International Piano Competition in Leeds, England.

Three years later Edna Golandsky and Dorothy Taubman came into his life. "In 1999 I was living in New York, and Giselle Brodsky called me to replace somebody at the Taubman Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Giselle knew me because she had engaged me to play at her festival in Miami, Florida. I had one day's notice. I had no idea what the Taubman thing was all about."

Itin soon found out that "the Taubman thing" was the method of playing the piano developed in the 1940s in Brooklyn by Dorothy Taubman and championed by Edna Golandsky throughout the world. "I met Edna in Williamstown," Itin says. "Then I heard people talking about some mysterious videotapes. I asked to see them. Now they're DVDs." Itin is talking about the ten-volume video series detailing the principles of Taubman's wholesome approach to the piano.

"I was glued to the tapes," he says. "They were quite dangerous. I got hooked. I got this virus in me. There's no way to eradicate it. It was unparalleled. I thought, 'Finally, here is someone who can really explain what is going on when you play the piano.' It was a comprehensive system that covers all aspects of piano playing, and the relationship between player and instrument. This information gets deeper and deeper, and brings new discoveries. It takes you to higher levels of playing and understanding."

"Once you start putting in things that are correct, it triggers other things that work right. You know what the possibilities are. You can't be satisfied with the idea that everything is not perfected. Being true to yourself, you know that you can't go on doing things that don't work. It's not just a belief. It's experience. The method is based on a scientific approach and deals with the human body as it is. It's based on how we're built, on how muscles work, and on the most efficient ways to move."

Having won three major international competitions, Itin began studying with Edna Golandsky, expanding his musical and technical capacities at the piano. He remains very much a pianist, despite two successful conducting gigs. Referring to conducting Gian Carlo Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors" in Naples, Florida, he says "I was somewhat uneasy. I feel safe when I'm at the piano because I know what to do. When there's no piano, God knows what can happen."

Ironically, Edna Golandsky has learned that the principles of sound piano playing apply elsewhere. She fearlessly ventures into non-piano areas. Several presentations in this year's Golandsky Institute are derivatives of the piano method.

With her son, Amit Friedlander, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, Golandsky has started Move Right Consulting, a company devoted to preventing and curing repetitive stress injuries that result from using computers. The first presentation of the new company takes place at the Golandsky Institute Monday, July 13, at 4:30 p.m. in McCormick Hall.

On Tuesday, July 14, at 1 p.m., also in McCormick, Golandsky, along with violinist Sophie Till, demonstrates the application of the Taubman approach for string players. Salvatore Rabbio, principal timpanist of the Detroit Symphony for 40 years talks about sound, tone production, and tuning on the timpani on Wednesday, July 15, at 1:15 p.m.

These and other presentations scheduled during the week are open to the public, as are the evening concerts. Day passes are also available. For a complete schedule visit www.golandskyinstitute.org

Piano Festival

Golandsky Institute, Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, and Richardson Auditorium, Princeton University. 877-343-3434 or www.golandskyinstitute.org.

Sunday, July 12, 8 p.m. Stephen Beus performs works by Bach, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Barber. \$25. Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, Princeton University.

Monday, July 13, 8 p.m. Misha Dacic and Hector Del Curto perform tangos. \$25. Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, Princeton University.

Thursday, July 16, 8 p.m. Yehi Wyner and Patric Connolly perform selections of Wyner's piano music. Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, Princeton University. \$25.

Friday, July 17, 7:30 p.m. Collaboration of a world premier of "Music for Athletes," a newly discovered Prokofiev work presented by Ilya Itin, a pianist; Paul Muldoon, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet; Jenny Scholick, choreographer; and Simon Morrison, Princeton music professor. "Peter and the Wolf" will also be performed with narration by Muldoon. Pre-concert lecture by Morrison, who discovered Prokofiev's work on a research trip to Moscow. \$35. Richardson Auditorium, Princeton University.

Saturday, July 18, 8 p.m. Antonio Madruga, 14, a Panamanian jazz prodigy. \$25. Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, Princeton University.

Lectures and Workshops

Monday, July 13, 3 p.m. "Beethoven's Late Bagatelles: Perfect Miniatures Among Giant" presented by pianist Luisa Guembes-Buchanan. Register. McCormick Hall, Princeton University.

Monday, July 13, 4:30 p.m. "Healthy Typing: How to Type Efficiently Without Discomfort, Pain, or Injury, Edna Golandsky, \$20. McCormick Hall, Princeton University.

Monday, July 13, 4:30 p.m. "Schumann's Kinderszenen" presented by Mary Moran. Register. Taplin Auditorium, Fine Hall, Princeton University.

Tuesday, July 14, 1 p.m. "Applying the Taubman Approach to String Instruments" presented by Edna Golandsky and violinist Sophie Till. Register. McCormick Hall, Princeton University.

Tuesday, July 14, 4:30 p.m. Screening of "Note by Note: The Making of Steinway L1037" presented by director Ben Niles. Register. McCormick Hall, Princeton University.

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