

# Piano Club Concert, December 7, 2014

The pianists at JLP both celebrated the holidays and remembered Pearl Harbor at a concert that was both musically beautiful and touching.

Dr. Ralph Hoyal, a local podiatrist and singer, as accompanied by Piano Club founder, Jud Goodrich, led the program with one of Jack and Charmian's favorite songs, "In the Valley of the Moon," an ode to their "little bit of paradise." He also sang a song based on a love letter from Jack to Charmian, called "Jack's Ode to Charmian," in which Jack describes Charmian as his "mate, you are a woman, one in a million."

Dr. Hoyal then sang a medley of World War II songs. He asked the audience to close their eyes and visualize the circumstances of December 7 and WWII. He did a rousing imitation of FDR, complete with glasses and cigar, and then an even more impressive imitation of Winston Churchill and his gravelly voice (resulting from smoking 8 cigars and drinking 8 Scotches a day). He set the mood of the times by singing the wistful songs "I'll Be Seeing You" and "The White Cliffs of Dover," then invited the audience to sing along with "God Bless America." A fitting tribute to a troubled time sixty-three years ago.

Zinaida Milyavsky played pieces by her two favorite composers, Mozart ("Menuet" and "Giga K574") and Tchaikovsky ("Waltz" and "Romance") with her customary verve and talent. The two Mozart pieces she described as "written like toys" during the years before Mozart's death, and challenged us to envision an elaborate ballroom of Mozart's day. She then played two "real" piano pieces by Tchaikovsky, which showed off both her piano prowess and the depth of Tchaikovsky's lush Romantic music.

John Dinwiddie entertained us with the "Sonata No. 5 in A minor D537" by Schubert, a challenging piece by a mature Schubert. He tackled the difficult piece with energy, feeling and skill.

Jim Wittes, the "piano man," lovingly paired the holiday spirit with the WWII remembrance, playing his charming, warm arrangements of songs from that period which captured both the feelings of the holiday and the pain of being absent from home, including "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," "As Time Goes By," and "I'll Be Home for Christmas (if only in my dreams)." His version of "The Last Time I Saw Paris" was even lovelier for his explanation the lyrics were written by Oscar Hammerstein, a Jew, who thought he might never see the lovely city again, except in his dreams, after the Nazi invasion. He also recounted that the song was banned in England during the war as being "defeatist."

Rubina Mazurka showcased her considerable piano skills, in two selections, "The Prophet Bird opus 82, no. 7" by Robert Schumann, and "Polonaise op. 26" by Chopin. As accompanied by Esfir Ross, she sang three operatic and art songs with poise and talent beyond her years. Two songs, by Mozart and Tosti, described the pain of unrequited love, and the third was a wistful love song from the opera *Evangelina*.

As in previous concerts, Esfir Ross completed the program in her own inimitable style, with a varied selection of pieces from, as she described, "the very obscure to the very popular." She began with the lush and lyrical "Méditation" from *Thais* by Massenet and "Barcarolle Mallorca" by Albeniz, transitioning to the *Yuletide/December/Christmas-tide* selection from Tchaikovsky's "The Seasons," which she described as very obscure but aptly describing December as a happy time in Russia. She finished with the well-known "Liebestraume" by Franz Liszt, a gorgeous piece that has provided music for many movies about lovers. As always, she captivated the audience with her exquisite playing and excitement for the music.

Review by Nancy Watson-Tansey