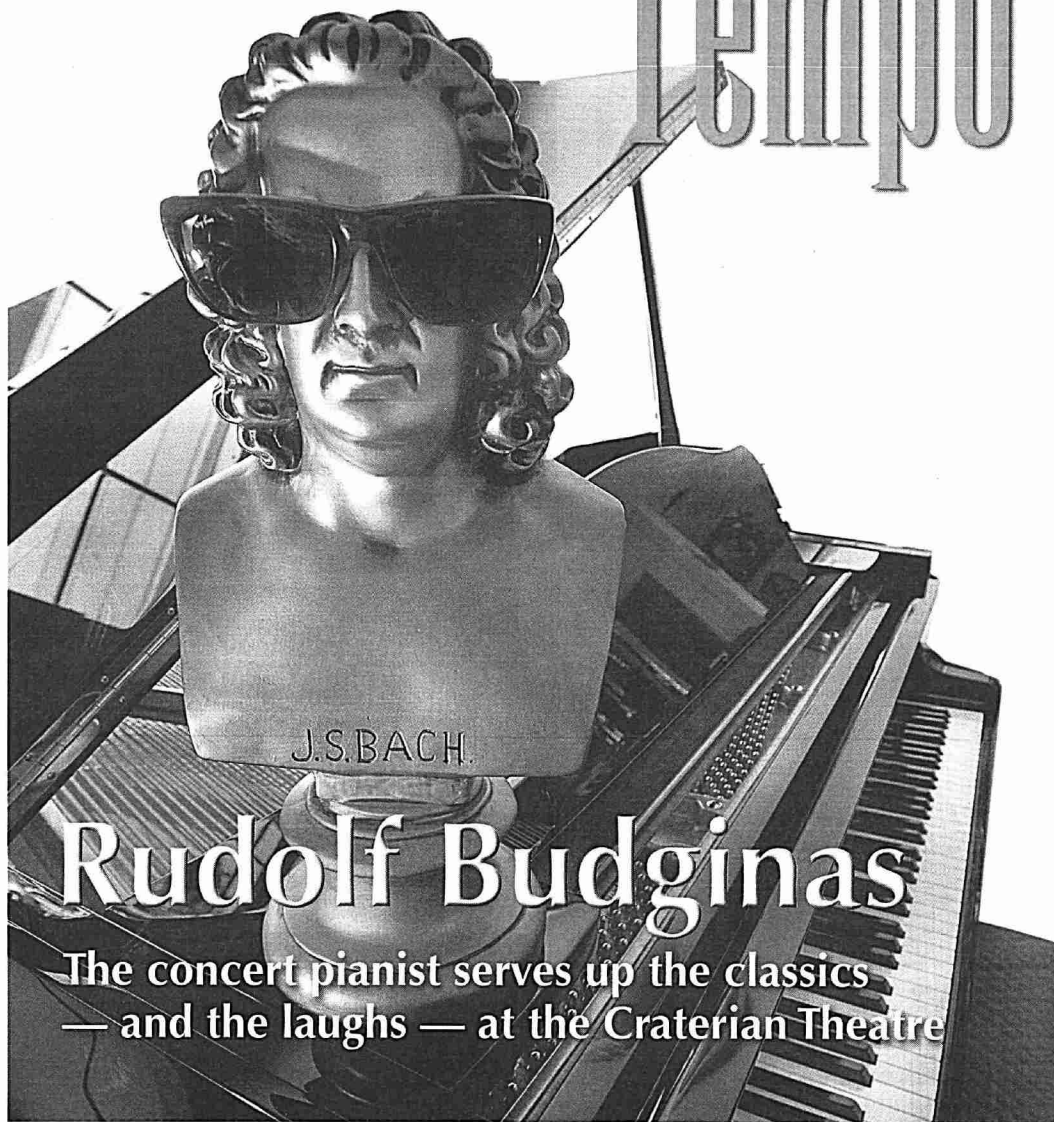


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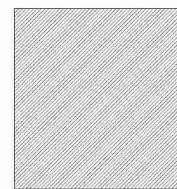
Friday, Sept. 4, 2009

Tempo



Rudolf Budginas

The concert pianist serves up the classics
— and the laughs — at the Craterian Theatre



Rudolf Budginas at the Craterian

The Lithuanian-born pianist serves up classics with a sense of humor

When he trained at the famed Moscow Conservatory, Lithuanian-born Rudolf Budginas (pronounced bud-guiness) was

By **BILL VARBLE**
Mail Tribune

an old world, no-nonsense musician heading toward a career

as a concert pianist. These days Budginas' concerts are filled, at least partially, with all manner of musical nonsense, but it's nonsense with a point.

Budginas is embarking on an 82-city, 32-state U.S. tour that will bring him to Southern Oregon for one show at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 9, at the Craterian Ginger Rogers Theater, 23 S. Central Ave., Medford. The show is being sponsored by the Jackson County Community Concert Association.

Budginas says in a phone interview that his shows incorporate his classical training, jazz arrangements and sense of humor and mix them all up in an effort to connect with audiences.

"Here in America there is a little bit different attitude from Europe," he says. "Europeans are set in their ways. Here, people tend more to entertainment. When I came here I felt the whole atmosphere didn't fulfill me, and audiences needed something more."

Which is why Budginas, who has toured across the world from Denmark to Japan, is given to telling stories in his shows about his childhood with a family of musicians. Or to explaining what certain musical lines from Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody" and Johnny Cash's "I Walk the Line" have in common. Or tricking up timeless classics such as "Claire de Lune"

and "Moonlight Sonata" with jazz accompaniments.

Budginas has been described as a classical version of Jon Brion, or a hip, modern version of Victor Borge. But he didn't foresee any of that when he came to the United States in 1994 on a music scholarship to the University of Southern California. He'd been

studying in Moscow as the Soviet Union was collapsing in the early 1990s.

"Lithuania was under the Soviet regime," he says. "Music was the thing to do. You could be free and creative. But you were deprived of a lot of material things. When the door opened in 1991, all the options all of a sudden opened."

He'd been concertizing when he met a professor from USC who encouraged him to come to the U.S. for further study.

He says there's a gulf between the way classical music is taught here and in Europe.

"In the U.S. a lot of people are studying at universities," he says. "It's more academic. In Lithuania and Soviet Union you go to conservatory, and it's all music. There's not all the academics, just musicians around you, huge competition and a lot of inspiration."

"Here they prepare mostly teachers, there it's performers."

"I've done both. I was lucky."

After completing a doctorate at USC, Budginas landed in San Luis Obispo, Calif., where he teaches music appreciation and piano at Cuesta College

IF YOU GO

Who: Rudolf Budginas

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 9

Where: Craterian Ginger Rogers Theater, 23 S. Central Ave., Medford

Tickets: \$25

Call: 779-3000

and is conductor of the Chamber Orchestra at Thomas Aquinas College.

About five years ago he was giving a concert when, on a whim, he played a little jazz and talked informally about musical relationships.

"The audience went crazy, and I said, 'This is it,'" he says with a laugh. "They were my experimental

rabbits. Every concert now is sold out."

These days he'll work folk or country tunes into his performance, rendering the drum and bass parts in the left hand and melody in the right.

Like all classical performers,

Budginas is acutely aware of working in a genre with an aging audience and not many replacements in sight.

"My goal is to bring classical back," he says.

To that end he chooses slight pieces, nothing heavy or overly long. He often wraps that in different contexts, say, tango or jazz or blues or Latin.

"You can hear Chopin in bossa nova," he says.

But above all it's entertainment.

"My main goal," he says, "is for people to have a good time and forget life's problems."

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On the cover:

Photo illustration by Bob Pennell. J.S. Bach bust and piano courtesy of Medford Music



Photo courtesy of JCCCA

Rudolf Budginas will bring humor, storytelling and contemporary sounds to his classical piano concert.