



## Budginas wows Sunnyside audience

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While temperatures were frigid on Dec. 3, inside the Sunnyside High School auditorium, things were glowing as Rudolph Budginas took to the stage with a stunning musical performance.

As an accomplished piano soloist, Budginas has performed in Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, Rome, Budapest, Salzburg, Cologne, Copenhagen, Tokyo, Riga, Moscow, Los Angeles, Seattle and Fort Worth. On this one night, he performed in Sunnyside for the second concert in the Lower Valley Concert Association's (LVCA) 2009-10 season .

Budginas (pronounced like the two beers, "Bud-Guinness"), originally from Lithuania, created an intimate and entertaining show where he played favorite pop, classical and jazz compositions like "Claire de Lune," "Moonlight Sonata," and Franz Schubert's "Serenade."

On each piece, Budginas added his own flair and interpretation to keep the audience enraptured throughout the evening.

Instead of just playing Franz Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody," Budginas played three different polkas, each with a pounding beat that would compel most to get up and dance in the aisles.

He started with Georges Bizet's "Carmen," but the

composition soon evolved into an Argentine tango.

Budginas said Bach's "Prelude in C Major" would be performed "his way" and soon the classical piano tune had somehow evolved into the Frank Sinatra hit, "Doing it My Way."

All the while, Budginas explained musical theory including the differences between romantic and classical music.

To demonstrate how composers expand on a theme, he hummed a simple tune from Franz Joseph Haydn's "Surprise Symphony," and then proceeded to play several variations on piano, followed by several more on the harmonica. Budginas even wore a black cowboy hat to complement the blues sound on the harmonica.

Budginas said afterwards that he wanted to spice things up a bit at his concerts, and he had learned how to play the harmonica while commuting in traffic in his car on the Southern California interstates. He had only been playing the harmonica for a few months!

Budginas performed "Gershwin's Prelude" on both piano and harmonica, before later embarking on George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue."

At one point, Budginas was a "one-man" orchestra as he played the piano with a conga drum or djembe between his knees, accompanied by his own cymbals and a bar of chimes. By adding percussion, he transformed classical tunes into something with a great beat that was entirely different. Periodically, he waved his arm to create the sound of tinkling icicles on the chimes and he pounded out a beat on the conga drum.

Budginas later asked for three volunteers from the audience. When no one came forward, three ladies and a man were escorted to the stage to play percussion while Budginas played a rumba on the piano. The four "volunteers" included an older gentleman from Prosser at his very first LVCA concert. Budginas said he had picked him out since he was wearing a cowboy hat. It will probably be an experience none



of the four "volunteers" will ever forget as they accompanied this esteemed pianist on the conga drum, triangle, cabasa and wood block.



"I want to keep my audience constantly surprised and excited throughout a concert," Budginas said.

Budginas clearly demonstrated a meld of musical genres that link classical music to contemporary hit songs. It was a lesson not to be missed, and the audience loved it as Budginas, the ultimate showman, kept everyone enthralled for the entire evening.

After the concert, most LVCA members agreed that this had been one of the most inspiring concerts in memory.

Budginas was happy to pose with several fans, including Gerry Stinnett from Sunnyside.

Budginas spoke with several LVCA members after the concert. He told them that he normally teaches music theory at Cuesta College near San Luis Obispo, Calif. His wife is an attorney, and the couple is eagerly awaiting the arrival of their first-born child in February.

Budginas, 40, recently became a naturalized U.S. citizen, but in this past year while on tour, he has probably seen more country than most native-born Americans.

He still appreciates the musical training he received in his native Lithuania. His parents, siblings and cousins still reside in Lithuania.

"They have been over here, but they are overwhelmed by the size of the United States," he said. "I am a product of the Soviet Union since Lithuania was under communist control when I was growing up."

Budginas said that he had received the best of musical training. His musical education took up most of his childhood, and he had his piano debut with the Lithuanian National Symphony at age nine. There were not a lot of toys to play with or time outside with friends when he was growing up.

Budginas later studied at the Moscow Conservatory of Music in Russia, and he won several

competitions in the last 20 years, including the International Franz Liszt Piano Competition, Vitolis International Piano Competition and the Yamaha of Europe Award. After he emigrated to the U.S., he earned a Ph.D. in music from the University of Southern California.

Budginas said he is glad he moved here since he and his neighbors in Lithuania lacked many of the conveniences Americans normally take for granted.

"We only had TV from 6 to 9 p.m., and only on one channel," he said. "Otherwise, it was just static. So people had nothing better to do with their time than to study, practice music or drink."

Fortunately, for those of us who got to see his performance in Sunnyside on Dec. 3, Budginas decided to practice the piano and play music.

For more information about LVCA memberships, call Liz Donaldson at 509-786-3070; Jean Corliss at 509-882-1668; Virginia Norton at 509-786-1142; Barbara Skinner at 509-839-5222, or Carlina & Jorge Lobos at 509-829-6596 (Spanish).