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History of the Symphony Comes to LLC

Instructor shares his unique musical perspective

Submitted by Franette Armstrong



John Prescott Photo provided

A six-week course that is guaranteed to open the ears of even the most seasoned concert-goer begins at Lafayette Library Jan. 30. That's because it will be taught by John Prescott, Ph.D., a musician who comes at the world of music solely from the listener's perspective.

Prescott was born blind. He can't see a score or even the instruments he plays. But when his mom discovered he had perfect pitch she set him down in front of a piano. You might wonder how parents can tell if their child has a gift like that. Well, Prescott told them.

"My grandmother went to Europe, bought two sets of door chimes and gave one to my parents," he recalls. Later the two sets got switched. "I was emphatic that my folks had the wrong chimes. One was a G chord and the other an F, although I didn't know the names of the chords then." He was 2-and-a-half.

From identifying notes by ear on the piano, to playing and per-

forming the violin, and later the harpsichord and harp, Prescott's life has been the sound of music ever since. He went to Carlton College in Minnesota, spent his junior year at Oxford, England, and returned to graduate magna cum laude. He then received a scholarship to study for two years at Cambridge, England and returned to the United States and UC Berkeley for his master's and doctoral degrees in musicology.

How does a blind musician learn and remember complex symphonic scores? "Everyone thinks you need to be able to read a score to play it, but I don't even use braille notation; I learn everything by ear and I remember it as sound. I hear the harmonies in my head but I feel the notes under my fingers, almost as if I'm playing them on the piano."

Prescott received his first companion dog at age 19 and now has his fourth, Joelle, a beautiful black Labrador. Part of her training was to attend concerts to make sure she wouldn't howl at the music.

"Joelle now knows more about music history than any dog has the right to know," he says.

In addition to performing, Prescott lectures and teaches music history and appreciation to students of all ages.

He will come to Lafayette Library Jan. 30 to teach his third course for UC Berkeley's Osher Lifelong Learning Program. Each week he'll take participants on a musical visit with one of the six major composers who have shaped symphonic music. He'll play the piano to illustrate concepts.

New OLLI Classes in Lafayette

Three new six-week courses from UC Berkeley's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute begin this week at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center:

War, Peace and the Media, taught by the famed journalist and author, Reese Erlich, analyzes U.S. military involvements in Syria, Iran and Cuba and how media shapes our knowledge and opinions of them from 1 to 3 p.m. Tuesdays.

History of the Symphony takes participants on an auditory journey to visit six major composers who have shaped concert music over the last 250 years. John Prescott, noted music historian, teaches the course from 10 a.m. to noon Thursdays.

German Literature and Film of the Weimar Republic explores the creative renaissance in Germany after WWI through works such as "Threepenny Opera," "Siddhartha" and more. Instructor Marion Gerlind is German and has taught in this field for over 20 years from 1 to 3 p.m. Thursdays.

For more information, visit olli.berkeley.edu or call (510) 642-9934.

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Part Two of the Leadership Seminar Series: Small Victories

By Sophie Braccini

A series of five sessions led by Saint Mary's College Leadership Center staff for members of the community who want to

take a short-term project from start to finish begins tomorrow night. The sessions, which will be spread over a two month period, are the practical follow-up to the first leadership series offered by the Leadership Center last September, which focused on how to expand the capacities of people who wanted to lead locally, and identified roadblocks to success and ways to work more collaboratively. Those who did not attend the September session will be brought up to speed.

The Town of Moraga, Lamorinda Presents, and Moraga Citizens Network are also supporting the program. Session topics include, "Gaining input from a wide diversity of stakeholders and creating transformative scenarios that lead to win/win situations" and "Completing the

process, noticing the wins and making future recommendations."

"Participants will complete something, and will own the skills practiced over the two months," says Edy Schwartz of Lamorinda Presents. If people do not come with their own undertaking, they will sit in on different projects, the objective being to internalize a change-making process that's inclusive and constructive.

The first meeting is at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 30 in the Serbian Cultural Center, 1700 School Street, Moraga. A \$20 donation for the series would be appreciated. For information about the Saint Mary's College Leadership Center, visit <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/leadership-center/about-the-center>.

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Third Grader Wins Elementary Geography Bee!

Submitted by Merilee McCormick



Burton Valley Elementary School held its National Geographic Geography Bee final on Jan. 17. Eight students qualified for the Bee finals, mostly from the fourth and fifth grades, with Lucas Oppenheimer as the only third grade competitor. After three rounds of competition, he won the Burton Valley Geography Bee. He has a chance to represent Burton Valley and Lafayette in the State Bee, if he qualifies.

Burton Valley Elementary School third grade teacher Mischelle Doll and Lucas Oppenheimer
Photo provided