

Pianist captures state competition

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

IRONDEQUOIT — It was 10 years ago that Matt Cataldi made his public musical debut, playing piano for his parish's Christmas children's liturgy — as a 7-year-old.

Anyone who foresaw a child prodigy was right on the money. Matt, now a senior at Bishop Kearney High School, recently won a state piano competition sponsored by the National Music Teachers Association.

And that's not all: How many gifted musicians do you know who also play contact sports? Matt is in his fourth year of varsity hockey at Kearney and enjoys lacrosse as well. Whereas some pianists have been known to take out insurance policies on their hands, Matt said he never worries about the consequences of heavy hits.

"It's a completely different world when you're on the ice. You don't think 'Oh, I have a (piano) practice tonight or a concert next week.' You just play the game," said Matt, 17, who plays defense for the BK hockey team.

A bigger challenge than risking injury, he said, has been getting enough sleep while honoring three major commitments — piano, hockey and studying. "It's definitely hard to get through the week sometimes," he said. "Your (music) teacher wants you to be just piano, and your hockey coach wants you to be at every practice." He almost decided not to play hockey this winter, but decided "I would just miss it too much."

Still, Matt emphasized that his top priority is music. Beginning at age 5, he took lessons for eight years under Betty Folger, a music teacher from his parish, St. Rita's in Webster. These days Matt trains with Patricia Hanson in the Eastman School of Music's Continuing Education Division.

Matt was a first-time contestant at the state competition, held Oct. 25 at the State University of New York at New Paltz. The initial atmosphere was intimidating, he said: "I had a little spark of hope, but I heard the oth-



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Seventeen-year-old Matt Cataldi, a senior at Bishop Kearney High School, rehearses before Mass at St. Rita's in Webster Dec. 6.

er contestants playing ridiculously difficult pieces. At that time the little spark was gone."

But Matt rose to the challenge, dazzling judges with his pieces by Beethoven, Debussy and Kabalevsky. "I don't really get nervous; you just block everything out," he said. "It doesn't matter if you play for two people or 2,000."

Locally, Matt continues his long-time musical involvement with St. Rita's Parish; he anchors the adult contemporary group on Saturdays and also plays at special services. In addition, he arranges music for youth instrumentalists at St. Rita's and helps teach them.

"Matt takes his music very seriously and is most generous with sharing his gift," commented Judith Leone, St. Rita's contemporary music director, in nominating Matt for the diocesan Hands of Christ Award he received earlier this fall for outstanding service.

Youth

He also plays piano for Bishop Kearney musical productions, not to mention trumpet for the BK band. In addition he's a pianist in a trio with the Hochstein School of Music & Dance, and he gives recitals through Eastman School of Music. Matt also works closely with a Rochester-area Christian composer, Stephen Robb.

For college, Matt is eyeing Eastman School of Music and Ithaca College. Hockey will still be in the mix, through either a college team or a men's recreational league.

Despite his musical successes thus far, Matt said he's looking to major in education rather than performance. "I'd rather be part of the lives of little kids every day, rather than be in the practice room for 10 hours. I just feel that's kind of selfish," he said of his career plans.

However, there is one area where Matt will have to go it alone. He admitted that his hockey buddies don't have any interest in the classical music CDs he insists on playing in the car.

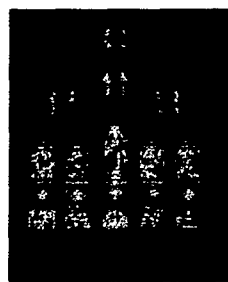
"No one rides with me anymore," he said with a laugh.



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