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CURRENTS

The News-Review's guide to arts, entertainment and television

Classical twist

Roseburg Community Concert Association presents
Rudolf Budginas in concert at UCC — Inside

Photo courtesy of Rudolf Budginas

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The News-Review

Rudolf Budginas answered the phone much like he answers most of life's callings: with enthusiasm and humor.

"What do you want to talk about?" he asked loudly, his Lithuanian accent as bright as his smile, both of which came clear through the receiver. "Life? Love?"

Born into a Lithuanian family of musicians, Budginas (pronounced bud-guinness) began studying piano at age 4 and made his debut at age 9 with the Lithuanian National Symphony.

"My family — my father, mother and sister and cousins and uncles — it was already decided ... I didn't have a choice," he said of his plunge into the musical sea.

Fast forward a couple of decades and today, the 40-year-old is embarking on an 82-city, 32-state U.S. tour. The Roseburg Community Concert Association will open its 66th season with a performance by Budginas on Friday at Umpqua Community College. Budginas resides in the San Luis Obispo area of California's Central Coast and is a professor of music at Cuesta College. He also is the conductor for the Thomas Aquinas College Chamber Orchestra.

During and after his studies at the Moscow Conservatory, Budginas gained international renown and performed solo concerts throughout the world. He's won prestigious awards, such as the Yamaha of Europe award, and has played to audiences in all corners of the world.

But it wasn't until Budginas moved to the United States that he developed his current classical, but charismatic, repertoire.

In 1994, Budginas accepted a full scholarship at the Uni-



Lithuanian-born pianist Rudolf Budginas, seen here in triplicate, will open the 2009-10 Roseburg Community Concert Association season with a performance Friday at Umpqua Community College. Budginas began studying music at age 4 and debuted at age 9 with the Lithuanian National Symphony. Friday's concert is the first of five in the association's series.

Photo courtesy of Rudolf Budginas

So you know...

WHAT: Roseburg Community Concert Association presents Rudolf Budginas in concert

WHEN: 7 p.m. Friday

WHERE: Jacoby Auditorium, Umpqua Community College campus, 1140 College Road, Winchester

COST: Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$15 for students and may be purchased at the door or by visiting www.roseburgcommunityconcerts.org.

INFORMATION: 672-0494

versity of Southern California to complete a Ph.D. in music. Soaring on his success and fame as a child prodigy, Budginas said in a recent interview that he expected to be welcomed with open arms, and smiles and welcoming faces.

What he discovered in Los Angeles was quite the opposite.

"It was very competitive, very individualistic, very fast, very cold," he said. "Everyone

was fighting for themselves. I realized I needed to do something. There was competition."

From that moment on, he found his passion in expanding the accessibility of classical music to American audiences and experimenting with techniques to do so. He began playing classical concerts and recitals, noticing a gap between him and his audience. That aspect was not satisfying to the musician, and he began to break through the barrier that separated him and the people for whom he performed.

He focused on changing the uptight and academic stereotype of classical entertainers, he said.

"I needed to communicate, to talk about what's on my mind," he said. "It was a huge reaction and I began to play lighter music and began to mix genres of music. That was a big breakthrough that opened

for me a new area to develop."

Budginas' audiences are treated to humorous stories about growing up in a family of musicians or a joke in between compositions. He's funny when he's not trying to be.

"I have an accent; I don't think I have, but people say I do," he said with a laugh. "It's kind of amusing when I mix up a word."

The audience can expect surprises and an entertaining show, he said, to accompany his own arrangements of Symphony No. 5 by Ludwig van Beethoven and selections from the opera "Carmen."

Roseburg Community Concert Association board member Helen Hilgers explained that every August, the board selects artists for the following season.

"Each year, we try to have (an artist) who will be of interest to piano students," she

said. "Piano is a big thing here in Roseburg. There's so many kids taking piano lessons."

While reviewing a DVD of the potential performers last year with other board members, Hilgers remembered when Budginas came onto the television screen.

"I felt that he really enjoyed what he was doing and that came across in the way he played," she said.

Hilgers described the 2009-10 season as "very eclectic."

A jazz a cappella vocal ensemble, a singing policeman, a blues trio and fiddlers and dancers will all follow Budginas' charm.

"My goal is for people to come and have a really good time and listen to live music and be entertained," he said.

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