William J. Browning, pianist, teacher

By John von Rhein
TRIBUNE MUSIC CRITIC

William J. Browning of Darien, 73, a celebrated concert pianist, teacher, accompanist, musical coach and competition judge who was one of the major links with the great piano pedagogues and soloists of this century, died of a stroke Sunday in Hinsdale Hospital.

He had suffered a stroke earlier this year and had been partially paralyzed in one arm since then, said Tom Schuntz, a longtime friend.

Great performers do not necessarily make great teachers, but Mr. Browning was a notable exception. The technical finesse and deep musical feeling he displayed at the piano shone through in the dedication of his teaching.

“He taught in the grand manner of the 19th Century,” said Dr. David Gehlhoff of St. Joseph Health Centers and Hospital in Chicago, one of Mr. Browning's many pupils.

For many years, Mr. Browning, who was born in Lawrence, Kan., taught at the American Conservatory of Music, Sherwood Conservatory and Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University, all in Chicago. More recently, he taught privately in his studio in the Fine Arts Building in the Loop.

Many of his former students are pursuing careers and teaching.

“You can always identify those pianists who were Browning students by the extraordinary quality of their playing.” said Eileen Deneen, the Chicago singer and voice teacher who frequently collaborated with Mr. Browning.

Those who were close to Mr. Browning found it hard to separate his courtly manner and sensitivity from his music-making.

He was the official accompanist for WGN's Illinois Opera Guild Auditions of the Air, a now-defunct vocal competition whose winners included Kathleen Battle, Sherrill Milnes and Vinson Cole. As a recitalist, chamber music player and soloist with symphony orchestras, Mr. Browning performed extensively throughout North America, Britain, China and South Korea.

Especially noted for his performances of works by American composers, he gave the world premiere of Chicago composer William Ferris' Piano Sonata (commissioned for Mr. Browning) in the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington in 1976.

He also played many American works as pianist of the Flancel Quartet, a group he founded and led in Chicago during the 1960s.

He studied piano with Carl Friedberg (a pupil of Brahms' and Clara Schumann's), Will Humble, Hans Heniot and Gui Mombaerts, taking undergraduate degrees from Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, Kan., and a master's degree in musical performance from the American Conservatory.
During World War II, he served with Army Special Services in Gen. George Patton's 3rd Army division.

Survivors include a brother. A memorial service will be announced at a later date.

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Chicago Sun Times OBITUARIES Wednesday, November 12, 1997

William J. Browning, pianist, teacher

William J. Browning, of Darien, a pianist, teacher and author, died Sunday at Hinsdale Hospital. He was 73.

The cause of death was a stroke, said Tom Schuntz, a friend. Mr. Browning had a stroke in March, recovered and started teaching again "for his last encore," Schuntz said.

Mr. Browning appeared with the Flancel Quartet in the Chicago Symphony Music Series and was broadcast on many WGN and WFMT programs. His was the piano accompaniment behind WGN's "Illinois Opera Guild Auditions on the Air."

He taught at the American Conservatory of Music, the Sherwood Conservatory of Music and the Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University. He maintained a teaching studio at the Fine Arts Building in Chicago.

Mr. Browning was a participant in one of the first cultural missions to the People's Republic of China in the 1980s. He took his master classes, recitals and lecture demonstrations throughout the United States and to England. He was a member of the Chicago Musicians Union.

In addition to his lifelong friend, Schuntz, he is survived by a brother, Eldon. A memorial service will be announced at a later date.

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Thomas P. Schuntz
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Planets return to PSU for benefit recital

On Tuesday, the students of the planetarium will give a recital to benefit the local planetarium. The recital will feature performances by students from various disciplines, including music, dance, and theater. The event is open to the public and will be held in the planetarium's auditorium. Admission is free, but donations are appreciated.

The recital will highlight the talent and diversity of the planetarium's student community. Performances will include a range of musical styles, from classical to contemporary, as well as dance and theater pieces that explore the themes of space and the universe. The planetarium's staff and students have been working tirelessly to prepare for this special event.

The proceeds from the recital will support the planetarium's educational programs, including workshops, outreach events, and public programs. The planetarium is grateful for the support of the community and looks forward to sharing the joy of space exploration with everyone who attends.

Tickets are not required for admission, but donations are encouraged to help support the planetarium's mission. The recital will take place on Tuesday at 7:30 PM. We hope to see you there!