

Making music with Maree



KIRSTEN FAURIE | TIMES

Maree Nordenstrom rehearses before services at the United Methodist Church in Mora on Jan. 19, 2020 — the last worship service before her retirement as their organist.

Organist celebrates 70 years of worship through music

BY PAUL LUTTER
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The girl who began playing the organ just as soon as her legs were long enough to reach the pedals has now retired at age 95 after over 70 years of accompaniment and teaching countless youth to praise God through music.

BEGINNINGS

Soon after they married, Bernard and Maree Nordenstrom built a home in Mora, across the street from Bernard's parents. It was at the end of WWII. Bernard had just returned from serving in the Army, worked in his family's construction business, and later would start his own construction business. Once their home was built, the first piece of furniture they purchased was a Kimball piano. Though Bernard died in 2009, the piano remained.

Raised in Chanute, Kansas, Maree can scarcely remember a time when music wasn't a part of her life. Her mother's older sister took piano lessons. When her mother's sister practiced in between lessons, Maree's mom listened and then tried to copy what her sister had played. Her mother would also sit on the porch during the summer and listen as the calliope played in the distance. She would then go inside and tried to play what she heard. She didn't know how to read music, but her mom could still play music by ear. "My mother was my musical influence," Maree said.

Maree first took piano lessons when she was 5-years old. Though she doesn't remember the teacher's name, she can recall that the teacher taught her to play by ear. Through that experience, Maree came to realize she and her mom had a similar knack for how they played the piano. "I inherited my mother's ear."

While she listened and played piano at home, it was at a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in her hometown where her eagerness to learn how to someday play the pipe organ grew.

Later, her church would give her a scholarship to attend Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma to study music, with special emphasis in the piano and organ. "I began to play the organ once my legs were long enough so I could reach the pedals."

When she arrived in Mora, Maree gave piano lessons in the high school. She also started to attend the Methodist Church. There was a pipe organ there, given by the pastor's son. After that, Maree was widely sought-after to play both piano and organ, not only in her Methodist Church, but in others as well. At the church, she played for every Sunday worship

'I learned to praise God through music from her'

Karen Nordenstrom
Maree's Granddaughter


service as well as weddings and funerals, never calling in sick. In the community, she would be invited to play for weddings and funerals, but for other functions wider than the church as well. "Maree is an excellent accompanist," her son Dave said. "She has a phenomenal ability to transpose and play music." Dave sees this as a rare gift, the ability to both hear and read music.

"I just learned to do it by accident, I guess," Maree marked. "That's my God-given gift. You can explain it, but it's difficult to teach it if you can't hear the music," she said.

Her arrival in Mora was a bit of a change for her, both personally and musically. Chanute had a population between 15,000-20,000 people. The music scene was more competitive where she came from. In Mora, she was involved playing music almost immediately.

"She should've become a professional musician," her brother Marvin said. And he would know. Marvin, known as "Doc" Holladay, is a professional saxo-


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DFL Caucus:

Tuesday, Feb. 25 | Open 6pm | Convene 7pm

Mora Elementary, 200 9th St. N., Mora, MN



Questions 320-515-1220 Don't forget MN Presidential Primary March 3 (Regular Precinct Voting Location)

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