

MUSIC: Maree teaches hundreds over lifetime

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tours with the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra and with Aretha Franklin, among others. It is recalled in the family that Marvin once remarked that “Maree was a better musician than he was.”

When I asked her what her favorite hymn was to play, Maree didn't hesitate. “Faith of Our Fathers,” she said. “I'm not sure why. I didn't grow up with it.” When I asked her to play the hymn, she walked slowly from her chair to the Kimball piano and sat down. Without looking at any music, she began to play. The notes she played were strong, confident and joyous. This was the work of a musician who knows her music, and her place in relation to the music.

“I learned to praise God through music from her,” Maree's granddaughter Karen said. From the time she was 4 until she was 12, Karen took piano lessons from Maree. When Karen turned

12, Maree made her learn how to play the organ. Karen played her first worship service when she was 13.

“Everybody remembers Maree as their piano teacher,” Karen said. “Every kid who took lessons from her gained greater appreciation of music. Maree is a profound musician,” she explained. From over 70 years of teaching lessons on the piano and organ, Maree's son Dave estimates that Maree has taught around 600 people to play.

Maree would teach all five of her children to play music, though only BJ, her youngest, still plays music.

“Maree is stubborn,”

Karen said with a laugh. Dave would recount practicing piano and Maree shouting from the other room “That's

supposed to be a sharp.” Scenes like this are the thing of legend in their family's lore.

Karen would go on to study piano and organ at Concordia College and to major in theology, and sacred music and organ music in graduate school. Karen counts Maree not only as a profound influence in her life as her grandmother, but also as a teacher and mentor.

“I learned discipline from Maree. She was the hardest teacher I had in my life.” Karen recalled not getting away with anything. And though she hated it as a

kid, she grew to appreciate it, giving shape to Karen's future in music and life.

Maree taught her confidence, how to sight-read perfectly. Because of the discipline she learned from Maree, Karen credits her grandmother for “lead[ing] me to be successful – in work, in life, raising step-kids and how to read people in a holistic sense.”

Mostly, Karen said, Maree's “...affection and love is transmitted through her music.”

On January 19, 2020 Maree played her last worship service at Mora United Methodist Church. At 95-years old, after over 70-years of playing and teaching for the community, Maree counts the opportunities a “...privilege to start people on their first lessons.”

Though she's now retired, Maree was quick to add, “I expect to be available, if necessary. I don't really expect it will be my last Sunday,” she said.



KIRSTEN FAURIE | TIMES

Maree Nordenstrom has been playing the organ for over 70 years, the piano for longer. Her family estimates she has taught piano lessons to some 600 children in her lifetime.

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