

ARSC New York Chapter

APRIL 2014 Meeting

7 P. M. Thursday, 4/24/14

at the CUNY Sonic Arts Center

West 140th Street & Convent Avenue, New York

or enter at 138th Street off Convent Avenue

Shepard Hall (the Gothic building) – Recital Hall (Room 95, Basement level)

An elevator is located in the center of the building

“Liberace: Entertainer at the Piano”

presented by

Dennis D. Rooney

The success of HBO's “Behind the Candelabra” in May of 2013 was chiefly due to the “nearly miraculous” impersonation of Liberace by Michael Douglas. Favorable audience reception brought a surge of renewed interest in the career and personality of one of the most successful and controversial figures in postwar American popular culture.

Born in West Allis, Wisconsin in 1919, Władziu Liberace (known as “Walter” within the family and “Lee” outside of it) was of Italo-Polish descent. He showed early signs of exceptional musical talent, which his father assiduously encouraged despite straitened family circumstances. By the forties, he enjoyed success in New York area lounges and supper clubs. He later moved to the Los Angeles, where his postwar engagements included the fledgling “sin city” of Las Vegas, an environment uniquely suited to his talents. He appeared on local L.A. Television in the early fifties, and ultimately began syndicating his own programs that featured his violinist brother, George, his mother and other family members in the audience, and the infamous (or iconic) candelabrum on the piano, his trademark since the thirties.

At a time when homosexuality was widely suppressed and rarely discussed in polite society, the androgynous and epicene mannerisms that were a feature of Liberace's appearances, and which intensified as his career progressed, did nothing to prevent his success in a mainstream medium, wherein he attracted a devoted audience primarily of doting mature women who never questioned his vehement denials of homosexuality. For a number of years, his earnings were among the greatest of all performers.

In view of the simultaneous celebrity he enjoyed on television and the severe criticism from critics in newspapers and magazines because of his alleged assaults on classical music, it seems particularly appropriate to focus on Liberace's recordings themselves, which began when he had not attained the fame he enjoyed only a few years later, and to contrast them with later performances of the same repertoire to discern what changes Liberace made as he labored to remove “all the boring parts.” It may have brought opprobrium from the musically educated, but as he used to say: “I cried all the way to the bank.” In addition to recordings, some video clips of

his early 50s syndicated television show and increasingly flamboyant later appearances will be shown. An abbreviated version of this presentation will be given at the ARSC National Conference in Chapel Hill, NC next month.

Dennis D. Rooney is an audio producer, narrator, writer on musical subjects and former broadcaster who has been active in ARSC since 1996.

He serves as classical music judge on the Book Awards Panel and is a member of the Technical Committee. He was a founder of ARSC's New York Chapter and serves on its steering committee. His program on Eugene Goossens was presented in this room in April 2013.



OUR NEXT PROGRAM WILL BE ON MAY 24, 2014

Jon Samuels and Joseph Patrych will interview veteran producer Thomas Frost



DIRECTIONS TO THE SONIC ARTS CENTER

Subway: Take the 1 train to 137th Street City College and walk north to 140th St. & Broadway, then go east to 140th St. & Convent Avenue. Take the A, B, C, or D trains to 145th St, go south on St. Nicholas to 141st St, (one long block), then west one block to Convent Avenue and south one more block to 140th & Convent Avenue.

Bus: M4 and M5 on Broadway; M 100, 101 on Amsterdam Ave (one block West of Convent Avenue.)



The **Sonic Arts Center** at CCNY offers 4-year Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in Music with a concentration in Music and Audio Technology. Their program provides an in-depth curriculum emphasizing real-world skills with a project-based approach. Students enjoy a well-rounded program, with emphasis on audio technology, music theory, orchestration, and history to help them compete in a field that today demands an ever-growing and highly diverse skill set.



All ARSC NY Chapter meetings are free and open to the public.
Voluntary contributions to help defray our expenses are welcome!

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