



Fall 2013

## Sharing the Moment

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### **Recommended Citation**

Obermiller, Tim (2013) "Sharing the Moment," *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, 2002-2017*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwumag/vol22/iss3/8>

This is a PDF version of an article that originally appeared in the printed Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, a quarterly periodical published by Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [iwumag@iwu.edu](mailto:iwumag@iwu.edu).

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## Sharing the Moment

### Cover Page Footnote

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**In a performance at her alma mater, Christine Kefferstan '73 combined talents with her daughter Mary.**

**Story by TIM OBERMILLER  
Portrait photo by B CORBIN**

As a renowned pianist, Christine (Bane) Kefferstan '73 has given performances around the world. But none were quite like the recital she presented Aug. 29 at Illinois Wesleyan.

Christine and Mary Kefferstan's two-piano recital in Presser Hall's Westbrook Auditorium finished a summer tour for the mother-daughter duo that included stops in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Christine credits [IWU School of Music](#) professors such as Bedford Watkins and Anna McGrosso for inspiration in launching a career that combined performance and academics. With a Ph.D. from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, Christine is now a professor of piano at West Virginia University (WVU), Morgantown, where she has been recognized for teaching excellence by both WVU and the West Virginia Music Teachers Association. Recent recitals have taken Christine to England and Central America, as well as many stops in the U.S. and Canada. Christine is also a founding member of the Sarasvati Trio (named after the Hindu goddess of all arts) with fellow WVU faculty.

Daughter Mary also keeps busy as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher. In 2008, she won the Concerto Competition hosted by Duquesne University, where she received her bachelor's degree. Since then she has played at numerous music festivals throughout the U.S. and abroad and recently completed a master of music degree from Bowling Green State University in Ohio. This year, Mary became a full-time faculty member at the New School for Music Study in Kingston, N.J.

After the Presser Hall performance, Christine described her eventful evening.

***How did the idea to perform together come about? Was this the first time you did so?***

We have played together some as I accompanied Mary's concertos, or we would read through music for fun, but this is our first extensive effort to perform together. We both love the *Brahms's Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, and after reading it at Christmas time 2012, we discussed committing to an entire program. I had a standing invitation to Malaysia for some time. It dawned on me that there could be nothing better than making music with my daughter — and so the tour-planning began.

***Was this the first time you or Mary performed in Southeast Asia?***

This was the first trip to Indonesia and Malaysia for both Mary and me. WV University has many piano graduates in this part of the world. Several of my former students helped make contacts and arrange concerts and teaching opportunities for us. WVU is very supportive of efforts that develop your creative energies and that have recruitment potential.

***I know that piano duets can be a challenge, requiring great precision and also allowing for a musical dialogue between the pianists. Does it make it easier to perform as a duo with your daughter, whose performance style and personality you know so well?***

I very much enjoy chamber music and have had wonderful collaborators over the years. Working with Mary was perhaps the most joyful of experiences! We breathe alike, we have many of the same instincts, and we agree on musical decisions. We found that we did not need a lot of discussion, and in fact, we often finished each other's sentences.

***Were you Mary's teacher when she was a child learning to play? And are you surprised that she chose a similar path to you, performing the same instrument and also teaching?***

I was not Mary's teacher except from the kitchen when I could not resist offering "help." Her dad and I totally support her independence and sense of her own path. I am delighted that she chose music — it is a remarkably fulfilling and rewarding kind of life — but it had to be her own choice.



***"We breathe alike, we have many of the same instincts, and we agree on musical decisions," says Christine Kefferstan, shown at left with daughter Mary, right. "We found that we did not need a lot of discussion, and in fact, we often finished each other's sentences."***

***Regarding the IWU performance, is this the first time you have returned since your undergraduate days?***

I played two solo programs at Presser Hall over the years, but it has been quite a while. ... In fact my memories of the size of the stage, the hall, and the building itself were not nearly as accurate as I had expected. One thing I do remember — it is a beautiful place! Really quite special.

***Did this represent a kind of homecoming for you?***

Homecoming is a good word. I grew up on a farm near Arrowsmith, Illinois, and attended Tri-Valley High School in Downs.

Many of my family were able to hear us perform together for the first time — making it a deeply personal experience for Mary and me. My mother is 86 and took it upon herself to advertise the program in the church bulletin, and to write invitations to various family friends and cousins. I reunited with a cousin who lived in Colorado until recently. In the reception line, a classmate from Tri-Valley 1969, and IWU days, Peggy McManus [class of '73] surprised me!

Perhaps most touching of all was the reunion with [retired Illinois Wesleyan music professor] John McGrosso, nearly 98 years young! His wife, Anna McGrosso [a piano specialist and accompanist for many years at IWU], was my mentor and friend for decades, helping me with issues of life and music in a way that still inspires me. John was also my coach when I accompanied his students at Wesleyan. Bill West, now a music professor at IWU, was a student at WVU in my early career. His assistance in arranging the recital and extending Wesleyan hospitality was heartwarming. So yes, the experience of returning to Wesleyan was powerful and will be remembered as the highlight of our concert tour.

***I have read you sometimes speak before and after playing each piece. Did you do that in this case and if so, what did you share with the audience?***

Yes, I find talking to the audience relaxes me and helps me engage with the listeners. I say a bit about each piece. Sometimes it is a simple statement about why we choose a work; other times I point out something significant about

understanding the music. And I always thank the audience for coming. Musicians work tirelessly to secure their technique and illuminate the composer's ideas; it is the process of sharing our music that makes it all worthwhile.

***Were there specific reasons why you chose the works for this particular program?***

This program contains challenging parts for both pianists, ranging over 200 years, and including Bach, Brahms and Rachmaninoff — all significant composers for our instrument. We kept the program the same for all seven concerts, learning new things each time we went on stage.

***What do you think it was like for your daughter to perform with you, especially in the setting of your undergraduate college?***

She was so excited to be at IWU — seeing the setting where my musical journey began. I think she was surprised at how much it moved me to be with her and back home.

***Do you have plans to perform again together in the future?***

We hope so! Her life right now is in New Jersey, so any rehearsals take a lot of coordinating. But since we both had such positive reactions, I think we will be discussing repertoire choices — possibly at Christmas.

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