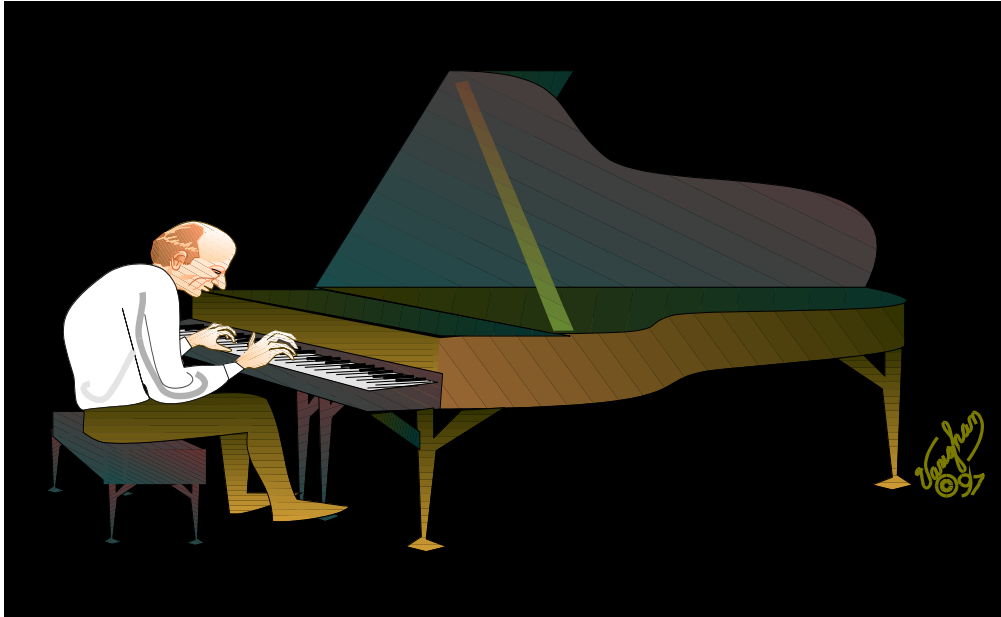


## *On Having Attended the “Shine” Piano Concert of David Helfgott\**

We all have bad times. In issue #82 of *Gift of Fire* I alluded to the rather “bad” Christmas of ’96 what with being knee deep in snow and ice with a power outage that lasted a week to say nothing of the trauma associated with a death in the family. But during that bad time, I remember at least two good times.



I don't go to the movies much. (Kay sometimes goes with our daughter Nola as when they and a niece I sometimes refer to as “The Little Divorcee!” went to see *First Wives Club*!) More usually we wait until they are out on video and watch them at home. But a few days after Christmas we were so extremely cold, I was beginning to shake from not having had my coffee and the left-over cold turkey was becoming a very bad memory, so we decided to take our already bundled selves out for a nice warm restaurant meal and coffee. While we were there, Kay (who usually comes up with the ideas – schemes! – in our household) suggested skillfully that we could stay warm a little longer and no one would notice our dreadlocks if we were to go out to a movie. So we did. Naturally, I am not a regular reader of movie reviews and care very little whether so-and-so and Heebert give two thumbs up or down, but I had heard some commentary on NPR (National Public Radio) on my way to work concerning a movie called, “Shine!” The story line is of a child prodigy who, being so controlled by a domineering father, goes insane and bounces around Australian asylums before being rescued by a cheerful astrologer. The actual victim supposedly played the music for the score, etc.. Anyway, it seemed a lot more interesting than the other flicks. So we saw *Shine*. I liked it. It made me think about a lot of things I don't usually, but which need to be air-dried once in a while.

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\* This article was published in *Gift of Fire*, issue 85, 35-37 (May 1997).

Sometime later (maybe a month) Kay was reading the media (a chore she does for us both since I was turned off of newspapers back in the late sixties when an issue I happened to read in detail, looking for something or other, covered in impassionate detail the flamethrowing of an entire South Viet Nameze village including women and children (who, the account did say, had been encouraged to leave!) because of suspected Viet Cong activities. A local Bellevue boy was being charged with murder for having swerved his jeep off of a road in Viet Nam purposely killing a small child. His lawyers from the states had happily been able to secure his release. I decided at that time that if I kept reading newspapers, I would be bonkers before long and probably out of a job in the “defense” industry since my expressed rationale (listening to Joan Baez after work!) for having gotten out of a highly classified assignment had already been frowned upon. Those were strange times indeed, but when on occasion I *have* read papers since, I have not been persuaded to change my habit. When we were running horses, of course, we got the paper for race results – the quickest way to get the data for assessing performance. By reading further on occasion, I learned things such as, “Trainer Kay Vaughan, mother of two, succeeded once again in pulling off a major upset at Longacres racetrack.” Who cares! Would they have said, “Fred Vaughan, father of two...?” I don’t think so. Sometimes they called her “Wonder Woman!” I liked that! But what kind of *news* is this? “Red Baron Returns, who by all rights should have been in an Alpo can, wins the derby!” Give me a break! ...but I have digressed again!

Kay relayed to me that David Helfgott was having a concert in Seattle April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Should we go? Why not? It was, after all, a very fond memory from bad times. So she got tickets. Meanwhile the Academy Awards – a big deal I guess. I didn’t watch but I heard that the actor who played David won the outstanding actor award. I don’t know who he beat, but he was one good actor. I know no one else who can say ninety-nine things in one second! One hell of an act! But what about the guy who does it as a matter of course? Kay told me David was being interviewed a few weeks ago so I sat down and watched. Among other things, the woman who interviewed him asked as he was climbing out of a swimming pool (a major therapy for him I guess), “Mr. Helfgott, do you ever do the back stroke?” Admittedly a truly stupid thing to ask, but his response I will not forget: “You-can’t-go-back-you-can’t-go-back-you-can’t-go-back-you-can’t-go-back-never-go-back-never-go-back...”

Time flies, fruit flies, I survived April fool’s day without foolishly accepting (nor even being depressed by the exposure of my foibles!) the appointment president Bill Clinton had so graciously offered me:

**Subject: You are invited.**  
**Date: Tue, 1 Apr 1997 15:44:35 -0800**  
**From: Bill.Clinton@whitehouse.gov**

**Dear Mr. Vaughan,**  
**You are invited to join Mr. Noah “Big” Banga as a co-chairman of the National Astrophysics Association (NAA). Should you choose to accept, you and your family will be given lots of good stuff.**

**Sincerely,**  
**The President**

**P.S. I'm not very good at this impersonation thing, am I Pop?! Anyhoo, happy April Fools Day!**

Sean’s always looking out for his Pop.

Kay did not survive so well! Tuesdays are her days on the slopes with the girls, edging her way toward an annual quarter million vertical feet! As I understand it, a Mogul (Ghengis Khan?) jumped in front of her and her ski did not release as it was supposed to on such occasions, so her Achilles tendon attempted to provide that function, doing a bad job of it.

She was a picture with her navy-blue dress, matching earrings and necklace, her arm sweetly nestled in mine as we walked very slowly into the “Playhouse,” a bright blue and white moccasin stretched over a cast on her right foot. There were thousands of others who attended the concert. At about ten past eight we were all seated and staring expectantly at the Steinway that seemed quite lonesome somewhat to the right of center on the bare stage, ugly baffles hanging behind it. Then a strange little man in a parachute blouse sprinted up to the piano as though a bullfighter ready to attack the curvaceous hulk.

I know so little about music that I am certainly no judge, but I noticed nothing other than a little too obvious hesitancy occasionally on the first piece. Nor were there major foohpahs noted by the *Seattle Times* the next morning as I understand there had been at earlier concerts on the tour. The *Times* quoted a child psychologist who is 43 (I don’t know why that’s important) – but apparently childless – who said,

“All of us who have overcome some sort of trauma can identify with him. We know what it is to fight through something and come out the other side. I feel like he’s part of me.”

By the time he played the *Hungarian Rhapsody* there was only beautiful music. I can’t explain it; I don’t even know how much I listened to the music. I was at times somewhere (and somewhen) else. Once six years old, walking into a music room violin case in hand; the only time I would ever do that. Prolonged minutes of vain attempts to pronounce my name. A compromise on the translation “Ray Bond.” More effective at home afterward, I convinced my parents that in spite of the kind gesture of buying the instrument for which I had pleaded, I really didn’t want to play the violin! My parents never put pressure on me to achieve. In fact they refused to let the school put me ahead because it might make an already difficult situation worse. After each piece David would trot the couple of steps to the front of the stage and do his monkey-on-a-string thing. Lips flapping furiously, smiling, swinging his arms back and forth, occasionally throwing his shoulders back to weird effect.

Then after an intermission and a couple of Beethoven pieces it was over. He bowed and we clapped enthusiastically. He ran off the stage. We clapped; he ran back. He played another piece. We loved it. He bowed, we clapped. He ran off the stage. We clapped; he ran back; he played; he bowed; we clapped; he smiled; he ran off the stage; we clapped till our hands hurt; he ran back; he played some more; he bowed; we clapped and our hands hurt some more; he ran off the stage and again he ran back but this time he just rocked back and forth for a while, smiling. This childish thing could not go on forever. He shook quite a few hands, threw some kisses and ran away with the roses.

And here we are and I still haven’t told you about the *other* good thing that happened to me last Christmas. Another time, another place perhaps.