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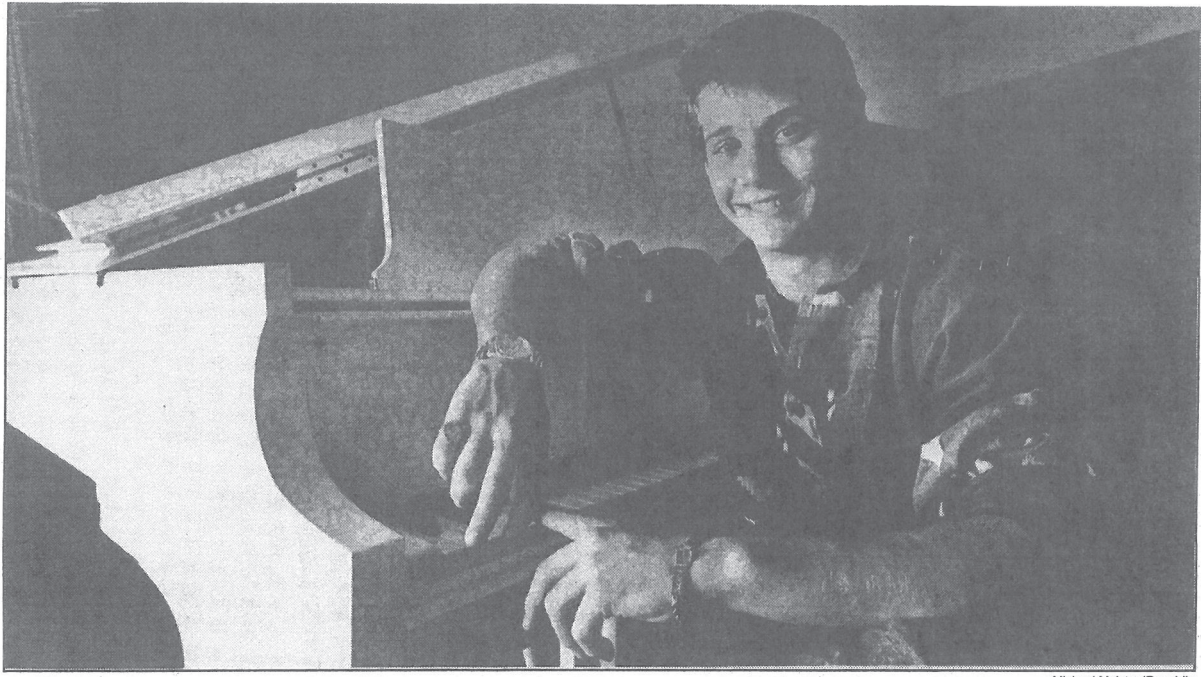
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Michael Meister/Republic

Eric Hamelin relaxes on his Baldwin piano. The 15-year-old protege of Liberace performs at the Arizona Biltmore.

Liberace's protege

Young artist cultivates popular style

By MARGERY ROSE-CLAPP
The Arizona Republic

Don't expect to find Eric Hamelin wearing rhinestones, feathers, lavish rings or a satin cape. Although the Tolleson Union High School sophomore was Liberace's protege, he dresses like most 15-year-old boys, in faded jeans, sneakers and a sport shirt.

Hamelin, with one foot in a teen-ager's world and the other in an adult's, is a professional pianist. Six nights a week through March 15, Hamelin will perform in the Gold Room at the Arizona Biltmore.

"Last night was my first night," he said of the Biltmore engagement. "I'm beat today!"

After school, he cleans his room, does homework, practices for two hours and dons a tuxedo for his 8:30 p.m. weeknight shows at the Biltmore. On Fridays and Saturdays, he performs two shows a night, at 7:30 and

9:15 p.m.

Hamelin, perched on a bench in front of the white Baldwin baby grand piano in the living room of his home, said he has always admired the man after whom he models some of his performance style. He, like the late Liberace, is a Baldwin artist.

"I grew up with Liberace," he said, darting across the room to remove a stack of record albums from a shelf. "See how much I like him? I've got the entire collection!"

Hamelin toured the country with Liberace from March to November last year. He attended the Las Vegas memorial service held for the entertainer Feb. 12, but he prefers not to talk about Liberace's death. He is too upset.

Hamelin does like to talk about how he came to — *Protege, D4*

Popular music / Review

ERIC HAMELIN

Tuesday through Sunday in the Arizona Biltmore Gold Room through March 15. Dinner show nightly at 8:30 p.m.; two shows Friday and Saturday, 7:30 p.m. and 9:15 p.m.

Teen-age pianist delights audience with poise, polish

By FRANK POLLACK
Special for The Republic

When the Arizona Biltmore booked 15-year-old concert pianist Eric Hamelin into the Gold Room several months ago, little did they realize what a timely move it was.

Since he was a protege of the late Liberace, the public was bound to be curious about a local boy who might inherit the flamboyant performer's mantle. Here was a youngster anointed and trained by the master himself to take over for him.

Showing a great deal of poise and polish, remarkable in one so young, Hamelin let his work at the keyboard do most of the talking. His introductions were concise, and while he may have been a little shy, refreshingly so, his performance was in many respects as satisfying musically as Liberace's.

Backed up by an excellent bassist and drummer from the Russ Carlyle house band, he opened his show with a colorful Gershwin medley. Playing with the flair of his mentor, Hamelin quickly won over the nearly full house. The songs that followed were also warmly received. The theme from *Pagliacci*, *Malaguena*, a collection of Eddy Duchin favorites, a lovely Chopin melody and an intricate *Flight of The Bumble Bee* were particularly outstanding. Bowing to lengthy applause, Hamelin returned for an encore of *Memories* and *Chariots of Fire*, which he dedicated to the memory of the departed Liberace.

Having seen and heard Liberace in his hometown of Milwaukee when he was just a young man in his 20s, I couldn't help but notice the resemblance Hamelin bore to his teacher of the past two years, not only musically but physically. But the youthful pianist is not a Liberace clone, a charge the late performer himself denied. As he matures, Hamelin will build his identity and in the process acquire his own coterie of fans.

Maestro conducts inspired forces in stirring concert

Music / Review

PHOENIX SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

With soloists and the combined Arizona State University Choral Union and Concert Choir conducted by Theo Alcantara. Symphony Hall, Thursday and today, 8 p.m.

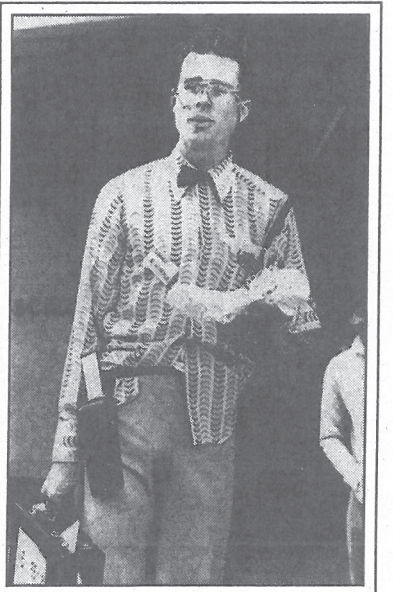
By DIMITRI DROBATSCHEWSKY
The Arizona Republic

Giuseppe Verdi was an honest musician who devoted his entire life almost exclusively to opera. It is, therefore, no reflection on Verdi's sincerity when his *Messa da Requiem*, written to observe the death of the poet Alessandro Manzoni, is deemed to be highly theatrical.

But despite many "operatic" traits in the *Requiem*, the music is reverent, stirring and, in places, penetrates the very soul of the listener. It also is the kind of music for which maestro Theo Alcantara has a remarkable affinity.

Supported by an excellent quartet of vocalists and the reliable ASU choruses, Alcantara and the Phoenix Symphony on Thursday performed the *Requiem* with majesty, dignity and the expected theatrical outbursts.

Soprano Margarita Castro-Alberty demonstrated superb musicianship, covering with her limpid voice a full dynamic range. Mezzo Nelda Nelson's interpretation matched the soprano's, and tenor Dino DiDomenico and bass Robert Hale, both with occasionally harsh voices, delivered well-phrased and highly expressive solos.



Unbeauty contest

Pat Wells shows classic "nerdiness" during an unbeauty pageant Wednesday at the University of California, Irvine. Although not a winner, Wells had fun joining with fellow engineering majors in lampooning their serious image. Held

AP

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he day might be the best," he said.

Will Harry, president of American Guard Dog Service, said that the dogs will be picked up during the months between June and September but that he thinks the move was unnecessary.

"I still don't think there's anything wrong with the facilities," Harry said. "This was done just to pacify the people who have complained."

Harry said that guard dogs are meant to be outside and that they will adapt to temperatures as long as they are given shade, water and food.

"In the summer, the coat develops so that it would protect the dog from the heat," he said. "A dog can take an outside environment, providing that's what it lives in. The dog can take the heat, just as the people who work outside."

Paul Runyan, shop supervisor for the district, said the guard-dog company is lax in changing the water each day.

"If they happen to miss, then we try to fill the bucket," he said. "I have caught that bucket completely empty."

He said the maintenance yard has had no problems with theft or vandalism since the district got the guard dogs.

"Here they are, saving thousands of dollars," Runyan said. "Why not put in a couple of hundred dollars to make them comfortable during the day?"

Harry admitted that, at times,



Tolleson Union High School sophomore Eric Hamelin with longtime idol Liberace in Las Vegas during their 20-city U.S. tour this summer.

Gigs with Liberace boost pianist, 14; Is halftime next?

By DAVID RAMIREZ
The Arizona Republic

TOLLESON — Eric Hamelin describes himself as "just an average guy."

Perhaps some students at Tolleson Union High School, where Hamelin is a 14-year-old sophomore, do perceive him as average.

But they might change their view of Hamelin if they knew how he had spent his summer.

Hamelin toured the country playing piano in such places as Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nev., and Radio City Music Hall in New York City. And he did this with his longtime idol, piano king Liberace.

"It all went by so fast," Hamelin said. "I'm not really sure if it's hit me yet. It was certainly good experience and a lot of fun."

Hamelin is self-effacing when he talks about his experiences and his future. But it appears that he is headed for success.

Hamelin said negotiations are under way for an appearance on the *Tonight Show* this month, and he is scheduled for another appearance with Liberace at Radio City from Oct. 16 through Nov. 2.

The road to apparent fame for Hamelin started at the age of 3 in North Adams, Mass., when his parents gave him a 16-key electronic organ for Christmas.

When the family moved to Phoenix in 1979, Hamelin was given a full-size piano and started taking lessons from Nicholas Pesce, who had noticed the boy's talent when Hamelin and his parents visited the piano store where Pesce was working.

Pesce, now one of Hamelin's managers, began booking Hamelin to play weddings and some nightclubs, Hamelin said.

In 1982, Hamelin played a con-

cert at the Phoenix Hilton ballroom, an event that his parents videotaped and sent to a writer for *Variety*, a daily newspaper covering the entertainment industry.

Hamelin said the writer in turn got the video through to Liberace.

When Liberace performed in Phoenix in February 1985, he asked Hamelin to play a melody for him in private.

"He listened and didn't say too much," Hamelin recalled. "When he walked away, I thought, 'I really blew it.'"

A few weeks later, however, Hamelin received a letter from Liberace's manager, Seymour Heller, asking him to play with Liberace in April 1985 at Radio City.

Also, to promote the event, Hamelin and Liberace played a duet on the *Merv Griffin Show* in March 1985.

"The show was really nerve-racking," Hamelin said. "The show was on national TV, and I was more than just nervous. Everything turned out good, though."

Hamelin also played in Las Vegas with Liberace later that summer.

Then in March he signed the six-month contract that took him on his latest tour with Liberace — a tour that covered more than 20 cities.

Though Hamelin has played with a big name and in front of huge crowds, he said he still enjoys playing smaller crowds and hopes to play during halftime when Tolleson Union has its homecoming game in November.

"It'll be fun playing there, but I don't know," Hamelin said. "Everybody at school might look at me differently afterward."

Teen moms invited to free baby shower

Teen-age mothers and mothers-to-be are invited to a free baby shower Sept. 13 at 10 a.m. at Wesley United Methodist Church, 750 E. Southern Ave.

The shower, which is sponsored

ing mothers and mothers-to-be more aware of taking care of themselves and their babies with appropriate nutrition and good parenting skills," she said.

Black said the non-profit organi-

children. "We started seeing a lot of teens in our adult programs, specifically in our child-abuse programs. They are adolescents, but with parenthood, with poverty, unemployment, and school dropouts com-

strollers also are needed, she said. Black said she hopes the shower will prompt the teens to become involved in Teen Choice, an ongoing program sponsored by the group, which focuses on family