

# YES

*Foundation for the Arts*  
YOUTH EXCELLENCE SCHOLARSHIP



SEPTEMBER 2007

## MEMBER NEWSLETTER

VOL. 1, No. 1

Greetings to all you wonderful members of our Y.E.S. Foundation for the Arts. I am particularly pleased to be sending you this first copy of our official Y.E.S. Member Newsletter. I had the desire to publish a newsletter for our organization while we were in the process of forming it. However, there was so much to do and seemingly not enough time to get everything done!

Now at last, with the help of our secretary/treasurer, Thomas Elliott, chipping in as graphic editor, we have completed our very own, very first newsletter. How exciting it is to have done this!

We will be sending you the newsletter about two weeks before every event. **Please be aware that we're sending the newsletter in place of my customary letter.** The newsletter will be packed with wonderful and exciting information. It will give you highlights of our past event, with pictures. We will feature a full page of the coming event, with all necessary information. It will often have a feature article about interesting people. It may even include a story about you and your musical background. Yep, there may even be pictures of *you* at an event, smiling, eating, or frowning.

Occasionally we will also print excerpts from some of our member letters; it's always uplifting to hear from you. We will definitely include informative updates about our past **Stewart Brady Competition** winners.

We will happily acknowledge our members who have been so generous in sending donations for the scholarship fund. We'll include a list of members' birthdays each month, so we will be asking for that information soon, i.e., day and month only.



Lawrence G. Bedini, President  
Y.E.S. Foundation for the Arts

I know you are excited about the progress our foundation is making. We are so grateful for your generosity in supporting our young artists. These aspiring instrumentalists and singers show us such tremendous commitment to perfecting the skills they need in building for a future in the Arts. They have expressed their gratitude to me many times. The scholarship awards we present each year serve as an invaluable enhancement for their pursuits. With dwindling resources available through

our public schools, I cannot stress enough what a vital role organizations like ours play in helping preserve our culture. Remember, our mission statement is:

**The Y.E.S. Foundation for the Arts exists to help promote great art by granting scholarships to young, aspiring instrumental and vocal students. In so doing, the Foundation seeks to raise awareness about the Arts and to encourage schools and teachers in supporting the artistic dreams of students throughout the Bay Area. We can all be proud of that.**

Now, I thought it appropriate to write an informative story about **Stewart Brady**, the namesake of our annual competition, as the feature article for our very first member newsletter. There is so much more I could write about him. Perhaps another time I will say more, but this will give you a fascinating head start.

Remember to look for your newsletter a couple of weeks before each event. **You will, of course, still receive the invitation as a separate mailing.**

Well, as they say in the newspaper industry, "Let's go to press!" Enjoy,

# Stewart Brady – Voice of a Century

by Larry Bedini

I first met **Stewart Brady** and his mother in 1954 while studying acting at the renowned **Elizabeth Holloway School of Theatre** here in San Francisco. (I was 22 and just out of the Air Force. Stewart was 38.) Miss Holloway was considered the finest acting teacher in the Bay Area and certainly one of the best on the entire west coast. Her teaching fostered celebrated actresses like **Carol Channing** and **Barbara Eden**. I was entering the school as Barbara was beginning her final year there. She was getting ready to move on to greater things in Hollywood. I was fortunate to have been able to perform in many plays with her and we became dear friends, enjoying many fun times together. Carol was already a big star.

During my time at the school, Miss Holloway suggested I study singing in order to help strengthen my voice, which needed it at that time. She recommended Mr. Stewart Brady because she knew of his background and his reputation as one of San Francisco's finest singing teachers. I went for my first lesson a few weeks later and knew instantly that I was in the presence of one of the most wonderful persons I would ever come to know. I studied with him once a week for about four years. After that time he informed me that he had decided to take me on as his protégé because of my progress. He and his mother had talked it over and decided I was worthy of the effort it would take to help me improve. At the time, I had no idea what this would entail. I soon found out that it meant taking one lesson every morning in which we would do only scales. Afternoons meant working strictly on repertoire. Each session went on for one to one and one-half hours, five days a week. I'll never forget the long, long hours of working on technique. Looking back, I can say happily how I treasured every moment. I was Stewart's pride and joy because I was so willing and eager to learn. Despite my youth, I was keenly aware that I was in the presence of greatness. The relationship between Stewart, his mother and myself was daily, constant and loving for 30 wonderful years, until the time of each one's passing. Although, I must be honest and say it still goes on. We have never really left each other.

Now, that informs you about how I came to meet Stewart and his wonderful mother. I want the focus of this article to be on who he was and what he and his mother mean to me and, ultimately, to our **Y.E.S. Foundation for the Arts**. I am sharing a little information about Stewart's life so everyone will understand why I have established a scholarship in his name, one in his mother's and, humbly, one in mine.

Stewart was born in the town of Golconda, Nevada, on



June 23, 1916. He would laugh about the fact that Golconda, which was already nearly a ghost town, ceased to exist a few years after he was born. His mother, **Margaret Polkinghorn**, was a singer, and his father, **George W. Brady**, a violinist. Both met and fell in love while performing in some of the local communities throughout Nevada. George was very interested in Nevada politics and several years later, became a sheriff in Nevada during Prohibition. Mrs. Brady often told me stories about how she and her husband would chase bootleggers, running them down through the fields

and woods and how exciting some of those adventures were.

One may assume that Margaret and George's musical talents played a key role in Stewart's emerging genius.

Margaret loved to sing and kept traveling and performing during her pregnancy. Several months after Stewart was born, she was holding him in her arms while vocalizing for a concert she was preparing to give in Winnemucca, Nevada. She suddenly heard Stewart begin vocalizing the same scales she was singing. She told me she was startled and thought she was surely mistaken at what she was hearing. She proceeded to vocalize, yet again. Each time she would sing a scale, Stewart repeated it to perfection.

In great distress and frightened, she called her husband and shouted, "Daddy, daddy, come home, I've given birth to a freak." (I can still hear her laughter as she related this to me.) They continued to "test" Stewart by having Margaret sing more scales. No matter what they did, Stewart repeated it precisely. Not knowing what to do about this, they eventually took him to a doctor to find out what could be wrong. He told the concerned parents that there was nothing physically wrong with their child, but he was quite obviously some sort of phenomenon.

Word soon got out about the child's amazing ability. People came from all over the area to hear him. Eventually, years later, the family made the decision to move to San Francisco, where possibilities were better for them, especially considering the blossoming talent of their son. George stayed in Nevada because he was heavily involved in politics.

Thus, Margaret and young Stewart moved to San Francisco. She was very socially minded and certainly had the personality suited to gain entry into San Francisco's high society. She was a woman of high moral standing, as well – a woman who wouldn't tolerate nonsense from anyone, and in those days that meant a great deal. I came to call her *Tiger* because of her strong and feisty personality – strong, yet loving. She was a five-foot, 95-pound dynamo who could take on the mightiest. She was interested in politics and was a great activist

for women's rights.

After she settled the family and established herself in the upper circles of San Francisco, she entered Stewart in numerous competitions. It didn't take long for word to spread about this phenomenally talented child. Of the many competitions he entered, Stewart won nearly all of them, or came in second, on piano. The most prestigious organizations and social clubs all over the Bay Area, soon, literally begged to engage this boy wonder to come sing for them.



Yehudi Menuhin

articles appeared about them, pictures were taken of them and, of course, fame awaited these fantastic youngsters.

Among the prodigies were **Yehudi Menuhin**, violinist; **Hephzibah Menuhin**, pianist and younger sister of Yehudi; **Ruggiero Ricci**, violinist; **Ruth Slenczynska**, pianist; **Grisha Goluboff**, violinist; **Harry Cykman**, violinist; **Beverly Blake**, violinist and of course, **Stewart Brady**, boy soprano and concert pianist. Quite an impressive list, wouldn't you say?

Stewart spoke often about those remarkable days. He also spoke about how nice and humble all of the children were. I remember how he would smile when reminiscing about the times he and Yehudi would play together and about what a shy boy he was. He would talk about how he really liked Ruth Slenczynska and Ruggiero Ricci. He told me that none of them really understood what all the fuss was about. All they knew was that they worked hard and enjoyed all their playtime together.

Many theories were suggested about the sudden and simultaneous emergence of so many child prodigies in the world. One theory supposed some sort of metaphysical world healing effect aided by the children's displays of genius. Another proposed that these children possessed

At this time, the entire nation began realizing that there were ten child prodigies in the world, and one of them was Stewart Brady. Oddly, all of them either lived in San Francisco or were born here. News



Ruth Slenczynska



were pronounced perfect by all authorities." *The San Francisco News* flatly declared of Stewart Brady, "Despite his youth, this boy is a finished artist. He has been heard in auditions and in public by the country's greatest singers, teachers and critics, who have declared him to be the most phenomenal boy singer of the century. Stewart plays the piano almost as well as he sings. He is master of a repertoire including nearly 100 of the classics sung in five languages."

He made his debut in 1927 in the Gold Ballroom of the Fairmont Hotel, although a few weeks prior to that he sang the role of the Youth in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in San Francisco's Exposition Auditorium, with the world famous **Louis Gravuere** and **Lorna Lachmund**, before a crowd of 10,000 people.

**Chopin's** piano was on tour in the U.S. and sent to accompany him for his debut. Stewart would have great fun talking about how thrilling it was when he was informed about this. It was, indeed, one of the greatest honors that could be bestowed upon anyone. He would get very serious and say he could feel the presence of the great composer as he sang. (Note the royal medallion embedded on the side of the piano near Stewart.)

**Chopin's** piano was sent on tour of the United States, and was played by **M. Maurice Dumesnil**, the eminent French pianist in whose care the piano was sent, in accompaniment for Stewart Brady, who made his debut recital at the Fairmont Hotel when he was 10.

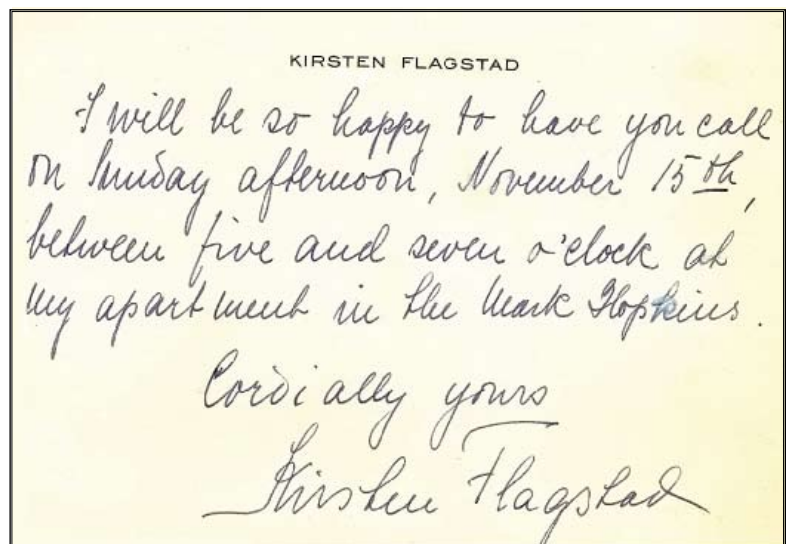
some special glands, causing them to develop such unusual abilities. And yet another theory began spreading about the effect of the climate in San Francisco upon the youngsters. The mystery remained unsolved, but everyone certainly could agree about the reality of these ten remarkably gifted children.

Though Yehudi Menuhin had tremendous recognition and was undisputed as a great concert violinist, Stewart Brady had the most extensive experience of all the San Francisco prodigies.

Tiger got such a kick out of telling how Stewart sang before he talked, doing so while he was still in the cradle. The uncanny excellence of his singing grew with his years and always brought great excitement and wonder to his audiences. Tiger told me how a millionaire contacted her and begged her to let him adopt Stewart. In fact, he offered her a quarter of a million dollars if she would release guardianship to him. How she chuckled about that one.

Establishing his notoriety in San Francisco, Stewart went on to thrill audiences all over the country with his singing, especially in Hollywood. It was written about him, "Nature endowed him with those things which most singers acquire only after years of study." Also that, "His voice placement and control

**Kirsten Flagstad**, the world-renowned opera star, came to hear him and asked if he would sing for her in her suite at the



Mark Hopkins. I remember him telling me about how elegant a lady she was and how lovingly she received him. He talked about how interesting it was that she sent him a formal note announcing that he could call on her between two and four o'clock on a



Newspaper announcement of Stewart and Mdme. Rethberg's recitals

certain day. Mostly, he loved the cookies and milk she served him.

Stewart and internationally famous opera star **Elizabeth Rethberg** were scheduled to give concerts here in San Francisco. He spoke of how they would



Stewart singing for opera star Tito Schipa

sing together in her dressing room, and of her magnificent voice.

Famous singers from all over the world came to spend time with him and listen to him. Among them, Spanish tenor **Gil Valeriano** came to hear him and sing with him. They all were astonished at what they heard. Stewart said he always had great fun about it. **Tito Schipa**, one of the world's great tenors, played for Stewart while listening to him sing, and was astounded.

Around this time, **Sid Grauman**, of **Grauman's Chinese Theater** fame in Hollywood, was getting ready to open his new theater. He had scheduled the premier of **Cecil B. DeMille's** silent classic *The King Of Kings* to be the opener. As was the great showman's custom, he decided to include a performance of a live prologue before the film was screened. (As part of the spectacle, Grauman wanted all kinds of caged, live animals on stage.) By this time, he had heard about this famous boy soprano, Stewart Brady. He sent for him to audition for the role of a shepherd boy who would come out and sing for the audience. Having been summoned, Stewart and his mother went to the audition.

Stewart was starting to sing the very beginning of the second chorus when Mr. Grauman interrupted the audition, embraced the young Stewart and, with tears in his eyes, told him on the spot, he was hired.

Stewart spoke years later of how puzzled he was about all the fuss made over him because he always had the ability to sing with such ease. (Tiger and I were so amused about that comment.)

The night of the historical opening of *The King of Kings* in 1927, Stewart

was just a boy of 10 years old. The theater was filled to capacity with high society, world famous movie stars and dignitaries of state. This was the grandest theatrical event in Hollywood history, at that time. Stewart said he



Stewart in shepherd boy costume at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in 1927.

was very nervous about the animals because the noise of the audience made them jittery. Due to this concern, his mother was allowed to be on stage with him, dressed as one of the peasants. She laughingly would say, "I was ready to grab him and run, should one of the animals break loose!"

For the night of the film's premier, Grauman requested that Stewart sing *Were You There When They*

*Crucified My Lord?* The house lights came down, the curtain opened, the prologue began and well into the scene, a little shepherd boy came to center stage and started singing. Before the piece concluded, the audience started going wild. There were shrieks of anguish and sounds of crying. Pandemonium erupted. Some people had to be escorted to help stations due to their uncontrollable sobbing. (I am sitting here typing this with tears welling because I remember so vividly how Tiger and Stewart would talk about it.)

That night the prologue barely got completed and the film's screening had to be delayed due to all the commotion. Finally the house manager came onstage, and after several attempts to calm the crowd, insisted on restoring order so the film could be shown.

The next day, Mr. Grauman called Stewart and his mother into his office for a meeting. He decided that Stewart must not sing that piece again because of the overwhelming response from the audience. A different song was chosen, *The Holy City*, and while audiences reacted with tremendous favor, no one became overwrought again. Wow! Wouldn't you love to have been there on that opening night for such an historical (and hysterical) occasion?

Tiger and Stewart spoke about the many celebrities who would later call on him and how excited he was to meet so many of the famous stars of the day and also how kind they were to him. He would mention his friendship with **Jackie Coogan** and the fun they had together.

Stewart was offered a contract by **Warner Brothers Vitaphone** to make short movies of his singing and playing. He was the first child vocal star to be given such an honor. He made several films, with recordings and movies, spreading recognition about his fame throughout



Grauman's Chinese Theater, 1927

the world. (I'm so proud to say I have, probably, the only remaining original record of his singing.) He went on to thrill the nation for several more years, singing with many more famous opera singers.

Then one day, following a long recording session, Stewart came out from his "dreaded

recording box," as he would call it, and said to his mother that he heard a little something in his singing voice that he wasn't happy about. There, point blank, he told her that he no longer wanted to sing. Tiger said that, though startled, she didn't want to oppose



Stewart with childhood pal Jackie Coogan

him, since it was his voice and she respected his decision. In later years after telling that part of the story she would add, "I should have given him a swift kick." The three of us howled with laughter over that.

When I asked Stewart what brought him to his decision, he would never tell (even me) what it was really about. Imagine, here was the world's greatest boy soprano at age 13, with the world at his feet, making a

choice to stop singing. He would say to me, "I heard something in my voice that I didn't like, and so I decided I would rather be a first rate singing teacher than a third rate singer." I never understood that because I have heard his recordings, and to this day, when I listen to them, I am absolutely awed at the beauty of his voice. As I mentioned earlier, he was also a concert pianist, and could have had a great career pursuing that. Tiger and I would sit and listen to him play for hours and marvel at the magnificence of his talent. Sometimes, during my singing lessons, he would suddenly feel like playing. Off he would go and I would sit there stunned by the beauty of his artistry. Something inside of him, however, preferred being a great singing teacher – and that he was.

Stewart told me about having heard a great tenor by the name of **Dino Borgioli** who performed with the great **Claudia Muzio** here in San Francisco,

in the opera *Tosca* in 1932 (the year I was born.) Stewart said he knew instantly, he wanted very much to work with him. Senior Borgioli had long been aware of Stewart, eventually coming to hear him perform one day. Stewart expressed to Dino his desire to be a singing teacher. Borgioli, Stewart and Mrs. Brady discussed this at great length. Borgioli was thrilled about the possibility of Stewart's working with him as his assistant. This would have been a tremendous opportunity for anyone, because Senior Borgioli was known as the "singer's singer."

At that time, Borgioli had been offered the position of official singing teacher at **Covent Garden**, the great opera company in England, which was under the baton of the legendary **Sir Thomas Beecham**. Borgioli accepted and Stewart was hired as accompanist for all the great opera singers, while Dino coached them. Stewart often spoke about the famous artists he would meet and how Dino would work with them. Dino had such perfect technique in his own singing that it was considered a privilege if he took you on. Mind you, I'm not talking about students of singing; I'm speaking of well-established, great, internationally famous, world-class artists. Stewart spoke often about the kindness extended him by Sir Thomas and how they would have many private conversations.



From left: Dino Borgioli (Cavaradossi); Claudia Muzio (Tosca); Alfredo Gandolfi (Scarpia) in the San Francisco Opera production of *Tosca* (1932).

Stewart enjoyed several years of this superlative learning experience before World War II broke out in Europe. The prospect of dreadful consequences made it necessary for him to leave England and return home. It was during that time he decided to begin teaching. At around the age of 19 he gave his first singing

lesson here in San Francisco. Word spread of his greatness as a singing teacher and he was soon booked to capacity. I witnessed, first hand, that he never stopped teaching until his passing in 1984. He would teach from 8:30 in the morning until 11, nearly every night. Each evening after his last lesson, Stewart, Tiger and I would go down to Bay and Columbus and have chicken dinner at Foster's Diner. How they loved their fried chicken! We would laugh and have such fun.

One day, **William Ball**, founder of the **American Conservatory Theater**, here in San Francisco, approached Stewart about becoming the official singing teacher for his company. Stewart held that position for 18 years.

As I said earlier, I met Stewart in 1954. The result of that meeting changed the rest of my life. It unquestionably altered the course of my entire professional development.

I wish Stewart were here with us now so you all could meet him. I can, with great pride, tell you that everyone who ever met him from the time I was around would say to me things like, "Who is this amazing man?" "Where does he come from?" "He surely is not from this universe." He was the most inspiring, loving, kindly man one would ever come to know. He was filled with love of life and love of people. He was a glowing example of unconditional love.

In this brief story about Stewart, I've had to skip many things about myself and my work with him during our years together because, as I said earlier, I wanted to focus on Stewart. However, I want to share a few personal recollections and pertinent details. After all, he was my teacher, my friend and my mentor. His mother was



Young Stewart and internationally famous tenor Gil Valeriano in full song

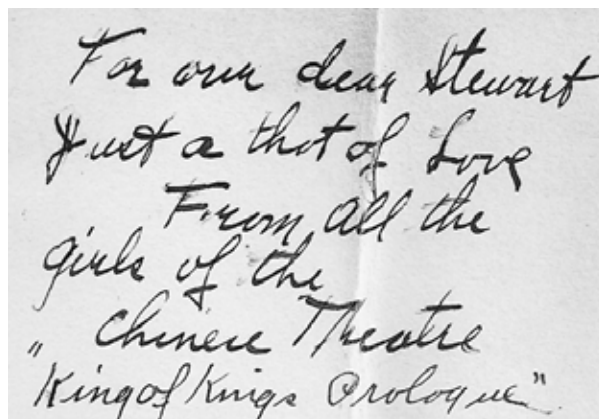
also my life teacher, my friend and my mentor. She loved me unconditionally, also. Stewart, Tiger and I loved each other as one – though in the most Platonic sense only – one in thought and spirit. During our 30-year relationship, Stewart and I never exchanged a cross word between us. I was the more temperamental one and would often get frustrated while studying. I remember he would simply smile at me and say, "Well, son, now let's see if we can do that another way." I remember how I would feel like yelling at him, but didn't. I knew he saw my fury rise, but he would just quietly say, "That's right, son, I think you can get this now." I have looked back many times and smiled about those moments and about how wise he was, *always*.

Tiger was a different story. If I ever showed temperament with her, she would point her index finger at me and say, calmly and with a steady voice, "Larry, don't you even think of it!" I knew immediately that she meant it and so I stopped. I look back now and smile at those precious times. How I loved them. How much I still do. That love has never stopped and never will. Tiger moved on in 1972 at the age of 92; Stewart in 1984.

Well, now you have a bit of insight as to why I set up the **Stewart Brady Competition**. I wanted the singing scholarship in his name as a tribute to him. I chose giving the study grant award in the name of Margaret Brady, my beloved Tiger. She always was passionate about helping to promote the ambitions of young artists. I placed my name on the instrumental scholarship because that was the only scholarship left.

Now I feel that you all have a better understanding about who Stewart and Tiger were. I know you would have loved them as I do and would feel blessed in their presence, as I did.

By the way, there is a bust of Stewart on the left as you enter the Music Room. It looks just like him. Say hello to him the next time you pass by. He would get a kick out of that. •



A note to young Stewart, 1927