



LOS ANGELES TIMES FILE/MCT
In this 1959 file photograph, Van Cliburn is seen during rehearsal for concert at the Hollywood Bowl. Cliburn was solo pianist. He died Wednesday after a fight with bone cancer. He was 78.

Remembrance

The Great Gift Of Van Cliburn

BY MARK SWED

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LOS ANGELES — Van Cliburn was a pianist, of course. He will be remembered for that big technique, big physique and big Texan heart, all of which contributed to making him such a sensation when he played. But Cliburn, who died Wednesday at 78, may be remembered most for being a phenom.

He was the right young Texan with the right big technique at the right time to make music and cultural history.

To the Russians, whom he wowed in 1958 in his famous win in the first Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow, Cliburn was exotic. He was not an American Cold War warrior but a gracious, gangling 23-year-old who showed that Russian culture had penetrated deep into the American backwoods of Kilgore, Texas. He was straightforward, a pianist who took music at its outgoing face value.

Tchaikovsky sounded terrific, it turned out, with a Texas accent.

Cliburn was equally non-threatening in his own country. He was easily recognizable as an all-American star. He had the quality of a great athlete, from his physical capacity to his good looks. He also had good manners. He seemed made for the ticker-tape parades, for appearing at the Kremlin, at the White House, on TV or at the Hollywood Bowl.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic snapped up Cliburn for the summer of 1958, while the public was in thrall to his massive celebrity. He was the first American classical musician to fill the Bowl on two consecutive evenings. He played Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto, a work now in the fingers of hundreds of pianists but then still thought to be beyond just about anyone other than the incredible Vladimir Horowitz or the composer himself. The reviews report that Cliburn dazzled.

He appeared again at the Bowl the following summer to play concertos for two benefit concerts aimed to help raise money to build the Los Angeles Music Center. Cliburn was more popular than ever. He dazzled again and filled the coffers. He could make his audiences believe that anything was possible, and thanks to him, Angelinos began to believe that a Music Center might really be possible.

Badgered by Dorothy Chandler, who was the tireless fundraiser for the Music Center and then the head of the L.A. Philharmonic, Cliburn, besides donating his services for the fundraisers, sent a sizable check as his own contribution to the hall. He gave a recital in the Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion as part of the new hall's dedication week in 1964 and returned there other times over the years.

This was, no doubt, a sign of his generosity. But the incident may also have presaged something else in Cliburn's makeup. He had several very good years as a pianist, but he burned out, never really growing into a mature artist. He appears to have tried too hard to please, to live up to what had become the impossible expectations. By the time I first heard him live in the late '70s, he appeared tired, acted nervously and played mechanically.

Soon after that he took a nine-year break from performing. When he returned to the stage, he was a flawed pianist who tried to recapture the old flair. But the freshness was gone, and that wasn't replaced by a new depth of expression.

In fact, Cliburn was, rather than

MONDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT													MARCH 4, 2013																																											
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BROADCAST STATIONS	Arthur (DVS) 8 (2)	WordGirl (DVS) 8 (2)	Wild Kratts (DVS) 8 (2)	The Electric Company 8 (2)	Martha Speaks 8 (2)	Nightly Business Report 8 (2)	PBS NewsHour (N) (In Stereo) 8 (2)	Antiques Roadshow 8 (2)	Relative Rhythms: Bow and quiver, emerald ring. (In Stereo) 8 (2)	A Classic Gospel Special: Tent Revival 8 (2)	Gospel Special: Tent Revival 8 (2)	Deception (N) 8 (2)	News 4 8 (2)	Peter, Paul & Mary: Carry It On: A Musical Legacy The trio's four-decade career. (In Stereo) 8 (2)	Chiefs on Tour 8 (2)	Antiques Roadshow A 1905 map of Spokane, Wash. 8 (2)																																								
PAY CHANNELS	HBO 17 (40)	HBO2 17 (40)	MAX 420	MAX2 420	SHOW 18 (435)	SHOW2 18 (435)	TMC 16 (18)	A&E 57 (41)	AMC 41 (54)	ANPL 19 (43)	BRavo 25 (55)	CMTV 38 (77)	CNBC 53 (52)	CNN 33 (49)	COM 45 (61)	CSPAN 49 (17)	DISC 34 (44)	DISN 64 (36)	DISXD 65 (103)	EITV 51 (62)	ENC 480	ESPN 28 (24)	ESPN2 29 (25)	EWTN 74 (65)	FAM 62 (40)	FX 23 (56)	FXNWS 50 (48)	FOXSP 35 (27)	GOLF 55 (30)	HALL 22 (33)	HGTV 54 (34)	HIST 46 (47)	KAUN 15 (22)	KWSD 12 (14)	LIFE 58 (29)	MNBC 66 (50)	NICK 32 (37)	RFDTV 131	SOAP 120	SPEED 63 (28)	SPIKE 30 (60)	STARZ 44 (46)	TBS 36 (57)	TCM 76 (53)	TLC 43 (45)	TNT 37 (59)	TOON 42 (38)	TRAV 24 (42)	TRUTV 52 (63)	TVFN 56 (31)	TVLND 47 (39)	UNI 69	USA 31 (58)	VH1 39 (76)	WE 30	WGN 16 (18)

TUESDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT													MARCH 5, 2013																																											
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