

Cape Town-born pianist dies in London aged 71

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PIANIST Yonty Solomon, who was born in Parow, nurtured at UCT and enjoyed an illustrious concert career overseas, died in London from a stroke on September 26, at the age of 71.

Prince Charles elected him as a Fellow of the Royal College of Music, where he was a teacher from 1977, rising to become Professor of Piano.

He was known for his special ability to inspire and to communicate with his pupils.

Among the famous names Solomon coached were Shirley MacLaine for her role in John Schlesinger's film *Madame Sousatzka* (1988) and Hugh Grant, whom he prepared for his role as Frederic Chopin in *Impromptu* (1991).

Born on May 6 1937, the youngest of seven children of Lithuanian immigrants, Solomon revealed from an early age that he was a natural on the piano and graduated from the University of Cape Town with the highest distinction in both music and psychology.

He continued his studies in London with Dame Myra Hess, Guido Agosti in Italy and Charles Rosen in America, winning several major piano competitions, including the Harriet Cohen Beethoven Medal.

His extensive repertoire included the complete Bach 48 preludes and fugues, *Goldberg Variations*, all 32 Beethoven

piano sonatas, the entire piano music of Ravel, Debussy, Janáček and Ives, as well as a broad spectrum of romantic music. He also gave numerous first performances of contemporary works.

One of Solomon's memorable achievements was to persuade the famous reclusive British-Parsi composer Kaikhosru Sorabji to relent on his long-term ban of public performances of his virtually unplayable, complex and extremely long pianistic works. In 1976 Solomon became the first pianist in modern times to perform Sorabji's compositions.

As well as his solo career with important symphony orchestras, he formed an inspiring but all-too-short-lived trio with the violinist Rodney Friend and cellist Timothy Hugh. During their brief existence as the Solomon Trio (1990-94) they gave concerts in London, Edinburgh and elsewhere and recorded trios by Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky.

Although he made London his home, Solomon periodically returned to Cape Town to perform at recitals and reconnect with his friends and associates.

In addition to being an avid collector of art, he was an excellent cook, and no matter how busy his schedule, always seemed able to find time to entertain friends.

Solomon is survived by his partner, Rowan Meyer.