

Chronicle Profile

She plays in memory of her dad

By IRENE PERRY
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The memory of Michelene Gentry's late father still burns bright and serves as an inspiration for the 18-year-old musician studying at the N.C. School of the Arts.

When she was four years old, Gentry's father taught her the basic keys on the piano. At the age of five, she started taking piano lessons.

Today, Gentry not only is a proficient pianist, but an excellent harpist, as well.

"If I can see myself doing or obtaining something, I can achieve it. It may be take a lot of hard work, but I know it can be done."

-- Michelene Gentry

When she received permission to audition for the School of the Arts here, Gentry initially wanted to play both instruments, but she hadn't perfected her piano selection. And, she was informed, there would be many other students auditioning for the piano, but not as many for the harp. She says the choice was obvious.

"I played the harp for the teacher," she says, plus, I had to take a basic musician's exam. Everything was positive. She (the teacher) liked my personality and my playing and I was accepted."

Gentry auditioned in May and was accepted into the school in late summer. She is a long way from her hometown of Detroit, Mich., but says that isn't a problem. She has relatives here who are understanding and support her ambition to

become a well-known harpist. She spends several weeks at the homes of different relatives, who also transport her to and from school -- for which she says she's grateful.

She credits her love of music to her father, who also introduced her brothers to music at a young age.

"My father played the trumpet, the piano and sang opera," says Gentry. "He had a teacher in college who saw he was musically inclined and she brought him a long way."

She says her father remains her idol and that he was always into his music. "When I came home from school, my father was always practicing," she says. "He was so dedicated, so truly dedicated."

He passed that dedication for music along to his daughter. While she was in high school, Gentry says she was awakened at 6 a.m. so that she could practice at the piano an hour before going to school.

After school, she would practice for two and half hours before she even started her homework.

"My father was always behind me to practice," she says. "At first, I didn't like it and I did it because I had to. I later started practicing more, because then I really, truly enjoyed playing."

About five years ago, the long hours of practicing the piano changed to long hours practicing the harp.

It began when she enrolled in a piano class during high school. Her music teacher discovered Gentry was too advanced for the class and suggested she enroll in harp classes.

"After I started harp classes," Gentry says, "I



Harpist Michelene Gentry: She credits her love of music to her father (photo by James Parker).

realized I thoroughly enjoyed playing. I guess it helps if you are musically inclined, but I learned a lot as I went along."

Although her father wanted her to be a talented pianist, she believes he still would be proud of her as a harpist.

"I'm furthering myself in music," says Gentry. "If he were living, it would make him happy."

After her father died, Gentry never considered giving up her music. But, she says, she did not practice with as much fervor.

Yet, she says her mother often reminded her that "You know your father would want you to practice very hard."

"My mother is also an inspiration to me," says Gentry. "In high school, my mother was always there. She even took off from work to come to my concerts."

"A lot of my friends' parents were not for them going into music, because it is not a guaranteed money-maker," she says. "However, my mother was behind me 100 percent. She never disturbed me. She would always tell me, 'If that's what you want to do, do your best.'"

Gentry says she's made tremendous improvements since attending the School of the Arts. Whereas in high school she could practice the harp after school for only an hour, she can
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Two-year old Jarett Crompton gets a look at Winston-Salem's official Christmas tree. He's held by his grandmother Mildred Cunningham. Andrew Thomas looks on. The ceremony was held last Friday night in Winston Square (photo by James Parker).

People On The Move

Ray gets promotion

Jeff A. Ray has been named an assistant vice president for First Citizens Bank in Winston-Salem. He is manager of the Healy Drive branch.

The North Wilkesboro native joined the bank in 1980 and has completed the management training program. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from Appalachian State University.

Ray has been active in a

membership drive for the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce.

He and his wife, Valerie W. Ray, live in Winston-Salem.

Lawanda Addison, a student at Bennett College, recently was recognized for outstanding academic achievement by being named to the Dean's List.

A health science major, she is the daughter of Mrs. Lula Addison of 3655 Yale Ave.

DST's plan Jabberwock

The Winston-Salem Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. will present its annual Jabberwock in March 1985.

The contestants and their parents recently were honored with a pre-Jabberwock Tea at the Delta Art Center to explain the meaning of the Jabberwock.

The Jabberwock has several purposes. First, there are scholarships for each contestant, with the girl raising the largest amount of money through donations, ticket sales, ads and personal efforts being crowned "Miss Jabberwock," and receiving the largest scholarship to a four-year college or university of her choice.

A second purpose is to provide cultural enhancement for the community and to the contestants.

The term Jabberwock originated in Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland," and means a night of pageantry and beauty.

Seleah Wyche, chairperson for the Jabberwock, introduced the contestants and their parents to

members of the sorority and discussed activities planned for them as Jabberwock participants. She then introduced sorority members who will help sponsor the contestants in their scholarship efforts.

The contestants and their parents are Miss Monica Parron, daughter of Mrs. Glenora Parron; Miss Chevelle Rice, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wilbert Rice; Miss Lisa Powell, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rondal Powell; Miss Sharon Rice, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Russell Rice; Miss Trivice Tatum, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Tatum; Miss Cassandra Perry, daughter of Mrs. Paulette Clements; and Miss Christina Brown, daughter of Mrs. Athanette Brown.

Mrs. Helena Tidwell, president of the local chapter, greeted the contestants and their parents. She thanked them for their participation in Delta's major scholarship program and she pledged her support and best wishes to each contestant as they vie for the title of "Miss Jabberwock 1985."

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