

# 'Doodling' Pays Off For Young Pianist

By MAGGIE DROMGOOLE

Tempo Editor

John Salmon spends a lot of his free time doodling.

He lets his fingers do the walking across a piano keyboard and his doodles often become original compositions. "Memories (not the million-selling tune) is one product of his free time spent at the piano.

"When I wrote the piece I was thinking about the sixth grade," he says. "I was sitting at the piano doing nothing. I was doodling like some people do on paper. I do it at the piano."

Salmon was thinking of his previous experiences and "by coincidence I played something that fit my mood." As he was playing a phrase caught his attention and it became the basic theme for the song.

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**HE PLAYED "MEMORIES" AND** another original composition—"Folk Dance"—with a trio that accompanied the Paschal Stage Band on a three-week summer concert tour of Europe.

The U.S. State Department invited the stage band to present concerts in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Holland and Austria.

Salmon was not part of the 18-member

stage band but was invited to go as pianist for a trio that also performed at the concerts.

"We were stuck in there to let the brass players take a rest so they wouldn't bust their lips," says Salmon, a master of understatement.

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**HE DESCRIBES THE TOUR** as "one continuous roll of action." "Over there we'd go to bed at one and get up at seven. It (the action) didn't stop 'til we got back." Some of the most vivid memories of the trip involved unplanned events.

After missing a night's sleep flying to London, the group discovered that rooms at the hotel where they had reservations would not be available until 4 p.m.

Salmon and other members of the group managed to get a few hours sleep before the first concert of the tour that night scheduled at Mecca Hall.

Mecca Hall turned out to be Silver Blades Ice Skating Rink. "It was like playing a football game," he remembers. "It discouraged us."

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**ONE DAY FILLED WITH** unplanned events started in London with a flat tire on the

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—Star-Telegram Photo

JOHN SALMON . . . classical pianist with an interest in jazz

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bus, which delayed the group two hours. After arriving in France, they had to wait four hours to get their instruments checked through customs.

The tired group, now six hours behind schedule, boarded the bus about 4 p.m. At 10 p.m. they realized that the bus driver had missed a turn and was lost. Finally, about one in the morning they arrived at their destination.

"In retrospect, I won't ever forget it (the tour), mainly because it was a little bit hectic and unorganized."

Salmon considers the "association with some members in the band a privilege for me. There was great talent in the senior class last year."

The tour presented him with the opportunity for musical freedom. The trio usually played two Dave Brubeck jazz numbers and two of his pieces.

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**PERFORMING WITH THE** trio allowed Salmon to improvise as he performed. "I altered it ("Memories") about everytime I played it."

And, the trio continues to provide him with musical freedom. "I let the trio be my guinea pig," he says. When he composes a "basic thought" at the piano it usually means the trio gets together for a "jam" session.

"We start in jamming and state a theme in chords. I don't write while jamming," he says. After the basic phase is developed, Salmon tries to put it with others in a meaningful way. "I don't think in 32-bar patterns," he explains.

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**THE PASCHAL SOPHOMORE** believes the trend now is moving away from the conventional ballad containing a, a, b, a rhyme schemes. He works for the overall sound of a piece instead of trying to fit the idea into a set pattern.

"If I really had my way I'd spend more time composing. The piano is the only outlet for my musical feelings. I'm pretty hooked. Most of the junk I write I never do finish. If I didn't go to school or take piano lessons I'd probably finish."

Salmon, 15-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. T. C. Salmon of 3712 Echo Trail, has been tak-

ing piano lessons for nine years. His mother explains that he used to watch his sister Carol, who is nine years older, play the piano.

"He would go to the piano and try to play," Mrs. Salmon says. "We thought he was getting into bad habits so we let him start with 30-minute piano lessons each week."

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**SALMON, WHO CONSIDERS** himself "a classical pianist with an interest in jazz," practices his classical music about an hour daily.

"If I feel very self-disciplined I can sit down and start practicing and work away on my exercises," he says. "Then I get sidetracked and start doodling."

He has won several awards for his piano abilities. Last year he won the Fort Worth Public High School Piano Concerto Contest. As a freshman, he was competing with students from high schools throughout the city.

"I was so negative about it," he explains. "But I thought it would give me some experience and I'd have another opportunity to participate my senior year."

(The competition alternates between piano and violin each year.)

He won a \$150 scholarship to the college of his choice for his efforts.

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**HE ALSO PLACED FIRST** in the Fort Worth Music Teachers Association contest. And, Salmon took top honors in the National Guild Auditions for a 20-piece program.

He has considered entering the Van Cliburn International Quadrennial Competition, which will be held here in 1974. "Each year they tighten the rules. I might enter. It depends on how far I'm pulled in the jazz direction."

Recently he taped an entry for the Young Chopin Contest in Buffalo, N.Y. He mailed the tape to contest officials and will receive notification 10 days before the finals, in late November, if he is a finalist.

"It's tricky. I'll have to practice not knowing if I made it." Meanwhile, he'll keep doodling around on the keyboard and developing his interest in tennis.

But, he admits that music is tops in his thoughts. "There's not as much philosophy in tennis."