

## TRIBUTE TO MATTHEW KENNEDY

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to salute a man who has touched the lives of so many in my community of Nashville, as well as around the world, through his music and his commitment to sharing his talent with others.

Matthew Kennedy was born in the segregated South in 1921, the son of a strict, school teacher mother and postal worker father. Only months after his birth, his father dies of a heart attack leaving his mother on her own to care for the family. Despite the challenges, Matthew's mother is determined that her young son will be able to take "serious" piano lessons with the town's white music teacher. The teacher agrees to lessons and in exchange Matthew and his cousin agree to clean her studio.

Even at this very young age, Matthew's talent is evident. The famous Russian pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff comes to his hometown of Macon, Georgia and Matthew and his mother somehow get tickets to hear the master from the segregated balcony. Matthew says his life was changed by that experience forever. Soon, Matthew is heading to New York, having won a scholarship to continue his music studies at the Julliard School.

While in New York he performs at Carnegie Hall and the Apollo Theatre. But before long he is on his way to Nashville. His Julliard teacher encourages him to return to the South to use his talents to help his people. Matthew arrives at Fisk University where he is welcomed by the director of the world-famous Fisk Jubilee Singers. He agrees to take on the role of piano accompanist for the Jubilee Singers and begins what will be a lifelong commitment to the school, the Jubilee Singers and his belief in the power of music.

Matthew Kennedy served as the director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers from 1957 to 1985. During that time, he traveled and performed with them in the world's most famous concert halls in Europe, South America, the Middle East and the Caribbean. He influenced the lives of hundreds of young students during those years, and inspired thousands who witnessed his performances and his musical direction.

On this coming Monday evening, September 25, Matthew Kennedy will be honored at a special event at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center. That evening Nashville will salute Dr. Kennedy at the premiere of a new documentary film that is a tribute and testimony to his accomplishments and talent. The film is directed by his daughter Nina, also a recognized pianist and filmmaker. It will be a special night for Dr. Kennedy and his family. But it will also be a special

night for all Nashvillians and music lovers everywhere as we pause to celebrate the life of a truly gifted and generous artist and community leader.

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Jim Cooper

Member of Congress