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Gymnast speaks at Messiah

Mary Lou Retton talks about 1984 Olympics

BY LEAH CARLSON
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The world remembers her as the 16-year-old American gymnast who did two perfect vaults and won five medals in the 1984 Olympics.

Now the 31-year-old Mary Lou Retton is a motivational speaker and a mother of two young girls who are just starting to learn cartwheels and forward rolls.

Shayla, 4, and McKenna, 2, are the little sparks that feed Retton's energy, just as her Olympic dreams did before.

The gymnast gave a presentation at Messiah College Friday night, urging the audience to take risks and follow their passions.

When an audience member asked Retton what her current dream is, she replied without hesitation, "To be the best mother I can possibly be. [My daughters] are number one. They are why I exist."

She talked about her triumphant moments at the 1984 Olympics and

the struggles she went through to get there, including an emergency knee surgery six weeks before the competition.

She exhibited the same enthusiasm, happiness and confidence that she had in her glory days, when she became the first American to win an Olympic gold medal in the all-around competition and the first woman to appear on a Wheaties box.

Fifteen years ago, when Retton was growing up, American gymnasts were virtually unknown. The Olympic stars came from the former Soviet Union and other eastern European countries.

No one really expected the 14-year-old young tumbler from Fairmont, W.Va., to outshine her competitors at the Olympic games in Los Angeles.

At 14, Retton left her home and family to train in Houston with Bela Karolyi, the famous Romanian coach who led Nadia Comaneci to Olympic victory.

"I had to learn to be resilient. I had to learn to seize the moment," she said at Messiah College.

Her team practiced twice a day for a total of eight hours, even when they felt sick, tired or

stressed out. Retton named hard work, determination and self-confidence as the necessary ingredients for success.

She encouraged audience members to reach beyond their ordinary, safe habits. "We spend most of our time in comfort zones, avoiding risks, avoiding the unknown, avoiding the potential to fail," Retton said.

That kind of hesitant, fearful behavior keeps us from achieving the most important goals in our athletic, professional and personal lives, she explained.

In 1986, Retton quit gymnastics and started giving motivational speeches to corporations and universities. She was an NBC commentator during the 1988 Olympics, and she wrote a daily column for USA Today during the 1992 and 1996 Olympics. She continues to do charity work for the Children's Miracle Network.

The gymnast married Shannon, an investment broker and former football player, in 1990.

"It's a challenge trying to find that balance between family and work, but if you're organized and preplan everything, it helps," she said.

Messiah to offer speakers

music in annual series

Olympic gymnast Mary Lou Retton and the Dutch vocal ensemble Quink will kick off the Messiah College Lyceum and Cultural Series.

Retton will tell her uplifting story of sacrifice and dedication in sports at 8 p.m. on Oct. 8. The gymnast amazed an international audience with her performance at the 1984 Olympic games, where she won five medals, becoming the only American woman to win a gold in the all-around competition.

As an inspiring and spirited athlete, she was the first woman to appear on a Wheaties box.

She was selected as a member of the official White House delegation to represent the president at the 1992 and 1998 Olympic games.

The presenters in the lyceum series, including Retton, will speak in Brubaker Auditorium at the Messiah College campus.

Author and TV commentator Jane Bryant Quinn will share insights from her best seller, "Making the Most of Your Money" on Nov. 5. Her columns appear in Newsweek, Good Housekeeping, and more than 250 newspapers. As an authority on personal finance, she will discuss

grades & in class budgeting

the economic outlook for the 21st century. Quinn is an Emmy award winner and a three-time winner of the National Press Club award for consumer journalism.

Dr. Ben Carson, the head of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, will appear at Messiah College on Feb. 25. He is known for his skill in separating Siamese twins joined at the skull. He wrote the best-sellers "Gifted Hands," "Think Big," and "The Big Picture."

Filmmaker Ken Burns will speak on May 4, as the last presenter in the lyceum. He created the award-winning documentaries, "Baseball," "The Civil War," and "Lewis and Clark." The New York Times called him the most accomplished documentary maker in his generation.

Season subscriptions for all four lyceum events cost \$50 for lower-level seating and \$40 for balcony seating until Oct. 8. Tickets for individual events are \$15 for lower level and \$12.50 for balcony seats.

A vocal ensemble called Quink, which debuted in 1978, will open the cultural series with its a cappella performance at 8 p.m. on Sept. 24. The Philadelphia Inquirer called its music tight and polished. Quink



has recorded on Etcetera and CBS labels.

Next in the cultural series will be the Amernet String Quartet, comprised of four young musicians from Brazil, Israel, Mexico, and the United States. They are the ensemble-in-residence for the University of Cincinnati, where they coach chamber music students. Their concert on Oct. 29 will also feature the Messiah College Concert Chorus.

directed by Linda

The Aquila Theatre, which specializes in innovative production drama, will take Feb. 11.

The David Leon will perform on piano and com

Leonhardt has recorded jazz musicians such as Stan Getz, Slide Hampton, and Jon Hendricks. His musical compositions have been recorded by Stanley Turrentine and David "Fathead" Newman. Leonhardt's "Tribute to George Gershwin" honors the legendary 20th-century composer.

the cultural series begin at 8 p.m. in Miller Auditorium in Messiah College's Climenhaga Fine Arts Center. Series subscriptions for all four concerts cost \$50, until Sept. 24. Tickets for individual performances cost \$15 each.

For more information, readers