

Musical Dream Come True: Learning but No Torture

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cians are nurtured with kindness and respect. They develop social skills and learn to share the spotlight. If they don't master the music, it is the teacher's failure. And if they burn out young, an overly ambitious parent may be hovering backstage.

This is no ordinary leitmotif in the development of classical musicians, often a cruelly competitive process. Mrs. Perlman, 59, remembers her own Black Fridays as a violin student at Interlochen in Michigan, the weekly tortures when all youngsters had to audition in front of the entire camp for their places in the orchestra. "I think that's horrific," Mrs. Perlman said. "It can't be good for any human being."

There's no star system here. Orchestra members are initially seated by height, then reshuffled for each new movement. "You know who's better and who's worse, but there's not a lot of competition," Rosie Armbrust, 18, a viola student from the Chicago area, said with evident relief. "Toby makes sure of that."

Friends remember, although Mrs. Perlman does not, when 19-year-old Toby Friedlander used a cafeteria napkin at the Juilliard School to outline what she would do if she had her own music camp.

Now she does. In its eighth year, its third on Shelter Island, the Perlman program for 37 elite string and piano students, ages 11 to 18, is going global. Next month faculty and campers move to China for three weeks with similar students at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Although she insists she never planned it, her husband, perhaps the most sought-after violinist of his time, has cleared most of his summer schedule to become teacher to all, chamber orchestra conductor, video host and an occasional unannounced performer under the big white tent. Along the way, he says, he has found a renewal of his own. But Mrs. Perlman is clearly the soul of the camp and its dreamer.

Reared an only child on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, pushed by her father, an amateur violinist, she endured teachers with the punishing, humiliating style of that era. Her father's idea of education was idiosyncratic. "He didn't feel spelling or math was important," Mrs. Perlman said. "He would keep me up late at night so that I could go to Carnegie Hall. Then he'd tell me I shouldn't go to school the next day because I would need to sleep. It was not very realistic. And it was damaging, because it took me out of the mainstream."

The healing began at Juilliard, where the legendary teacher Dorothy DeLay showed her another way to learn. "Sugarplum," said Miss DeLay, who died last March, "I love the way you play that phrase." Young Toby never cried at a lesson again.

In 1963, at an upstate New York music camp, Meadowmount, Toby, 20, heard a fellow student play the Tzigane by Ravel. Toby thought, "I cannot live without that sound," and she ran backstage to blurt, "I want to marry you!" Not quite 18, Isaac,



Nicale Bengiveno/The New York Times

Toby Perlman, founder of the Perlman Music Program on Shelter Island, with her husband, Itzhak, at a discussion session with students.

Notes From Music Camp

Articles in this series, which began on June 27, follow the experience of gifted students at a summer camp. The previous article:

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Perlman, as he was known there, was uncharacteristically without a quick comeback. They married New Year's Eve in 1966. Today they have five children, 18 to 33, three of them classical musicians, one a rocker.

For most of her adult life, Mrs. Perlman was a full-time mother, often on her own, as her husband's touring career grew. She also participated actively in his professional career decisions about repertory, recordings and where to play. She characterizes her husband as "grossly disorganized and a bit of a space cadet."

Eight years ago, at a meeting to plan a music festival in East Hampton, N.Y., where the Perlmans have a house, the subject of a school was brought up. Mrs. Perlman says she piped up: "'You want a school? Here's a school.' I designed a program just like that. Clearly it was sitting in my head. I just didn't know it."

An acquaintance, Suki Sandler, a theatrical producer and member of the Carnegie Hall board, offered to raise the money, even after the two

women decided not to become involved in the festival. Mrs. Perlman booked her "dream faculty" — among them that first summer (and still), Miyoko Lotto, who teaches piano at New York University and at the Manhattan School of Music, and Patinka Kopec, who works with Pinchas Zukerman at the Manhattan School. Later she added the pianist Rohan De Silva, who performs regularly with Mr. Perlman; Ron Leonard, cello professor at the University of Southern California; and the cellist André Emelianoff and the violist Heidi Castleman, both Juilliard teachers, among a dozen others who appear for at least two weeks any given summer.

"I don't pay the way other programs pay," Mrs. Perlman said. "I pay better."

Openings for campers, which are few, are mainly filled by recommendations followed by auditions, in person or on tape. Most campers are invited back until they are 18. Places open by instrument (this year there are 15 violins, 10 cellos, 5 violas, 1 bass and 6 pianos), but Mrs. Perl-

man also tries to balance by sex and age.

As the camp grew from two weeks to six (five this year and three more in China) and left the Hamptons for Shelter Island, the money followed. Steven Spielberg and Ronald and Jo Carole Lauder helped buy a shabby, 28-acre resort on a curve of the shore here for about \$4 million. Its tiny cabins were perfect for practice rooms, the bungalows for faculty housing, the rambling buildings for dorms and dining hall. Bringing the property up to code and comfort and paying for faculty and visiting artists (the Cavanni Quartet came from Cleveland this year) used up all the founting resources, said Catherine Arcure, the program's executive director.

There is no endowment. Capital expenditures aside, Ms. Arcure said, the program must raise about \$17,500 per camper per year. Tuition is only \$4,300 of that (\$1,600 more for the China segment this year), although most campers receive at least partial scholarships, said Ms. Sandler, who is now president of the program's board. There are two major benefit concerts a year, one in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, another on Shelter Island.

The need to raise money sometimes intrudes on the carefree silliness of Toby's dream of "normal" camp life. Weird Hair Day was called off when Alberto W. Vilar announced he was dropping by. This virtuoso technology investor and philanthropist had recently provided air-conditioning for the boys' dorm — the site of Video Night — which is now named for him.

Real life always intrudes on dreaming.

Ms. Sandler's husband, Herman, who took campers for rides on his yacht, No Problem, died in the World Trade Center on Sept. 11. Mrs. Perlman has been treated for cancer for several years. There is an urgency to her dream of nurturing young talent so that they don't become casualties of their own precociousness.

"They can be brilliant at age 11 and nothing much at age 17," Mrs. Perlman said. "There's nothing inside because they've been practicing all the time."

So there are arts and crafts, swimming, a trip to a water park; advice to learn the repertory and skip the competitions; and rules that make some parents furious. No cellphones in the practice rooms; too many parents were demanding that their children let them hear their practice sessions. Kitchen cleanup duties for all, despite fears for those precious little hands.

For Mrs. Perlman, big breakthroughs often have little to do with repertory or technique. She remembers when last summer Rachel Lee, then 13, who has played at the Grammy Awards, took up nail polish and strolled the camp flashing bright shiny toenails. Mrs. Perlman remembers a stiff, overly intellectual 13-year-old who finally acted his age on Backwards Day when he walked into Mr. Perlman's studio with his Jockey shorts on his head.

"That's what we're aiming for," Mrs. Perlman said. "Yes, yes, yes."



Photographs by Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

Students in the Perlman Music Program are encouraged to play as well as work. Here they relax around a laptop.

A Musical Dream Come True

Thou Shalt Learn to Play Without Being Tortured

By LOIS B. MORRIS
and ROBERT LIPSYTE

SHELTER ISLAND, N.Y., July 24 — Nobody skips Video Night. Campers sprawl on the floor of the boys' dormitory, counselors and teachers straddle chairs, as their heroes perform on the big-screen television. They applaud and cheer as if

NOTES FROM MUSIC CAMP

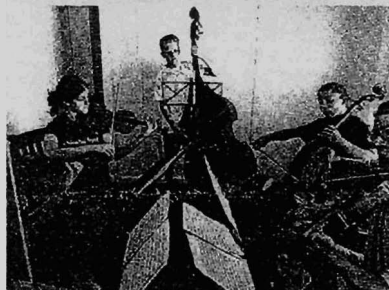
*Practicing to Be Normal,
Even When Life Isn't*

Glenn Gould, Jascha Heifetz and Vladimir Horowitz were in the room.

Itzhak Perlman, the V.J., calls for comments. When a 13-year-old mentions technique, Mr. Perlman says: "Never mind technique. They had fantastic control of rhythm."

A sharp voice chimes in. "I'm thinking about them as personalities."

Mr. Perlman warms to the subject: "We're talking about three great people who were off the wall."



Patrick Romano directs the choir, top. Above, Michelle Ross, Chris Maxwell and Justina Sullivan in a Dvorak piece.

Now Toby Perlman, his wife, solos on her favorite theme. "It was because of how early they started to perform in public," she says. She accents her phrases, varies her pitch. "They had no chance to grow. They had no chance to know who they were. None of them knew how to get along with people. Horowitz was ding-dong. His conversation was like a 7-year-old's. You want to aim to be normal, because what you do is not normal."

What they do, in summer on an island off the Hamptons, is practice their instruments alone four hours a day, take private lessons and group classes, play in chamber groups and an orchestra and sing in chorus. Then they talk about music and maybe rehearse a bit more before bedtime. Many nights they perform free in a tent in front of large audiences, where mosquitoes bite and babies cry.

How they do all this in the rarefied bubble of the Perlman Music Program has come to be known as Toby's dream, which, before it was even her e-mail address, was as simple as a commandment: Thou shalt learn to play music without being tortured.

In Toby's dream all gifted young musi-

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Thank Goodness He's Not a Pianist

A cello on his back, Gal Nyska walks with Nadav Hertzka at Toby and Itzhak Perlman's music camp in Shelter Island, N.Y. The camp's goal is to help young musicians develop into well-rounded people. Page E1.