

THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 2010

MUSIC

# Child to Musician

*Perlman program allows young talent to grow through works in progress*

BY ANDREW RUDANSKY

A teenage girl walked out to center stage with a violin in her hand and took an awkward bow before placing her instrument up to her chin and began to play. The audience, classical music lovers numbering in the hundreds, sat in silent approval as she moved through the first movement of her piece and onto the second.

There were no beads of sweat, nor any sign of nervousness; just a passion as seen in professional musicians, as she swayed in time with the movement of her violin bow.

This young musician and others like her showcased their talents this past weekend, when The Perlman Music Program Summer Music School kicked off their summer concert series "Works in Progress" at their beachfront Shelter Island campus. The performers, all students between the ages of 12 and 18, played classical string arrangements on both days.



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THE MAESTRO at work

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# Children to musicians

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The Perlman Music Program was created in 1993 by Toby Perlman, with the help of her husband, famed violinist and composer Itzhak Perlman. They are entering their eleventh year at their current Shelter Island campus and the couple said the program and its summer music school provide exceptionally talented children with the opportunity to train with world class musicians.

"This is probably one of the most competitive music programs in the world to get into...We can have 100 violin applicants, and only two are issued spots," said Toby in an interview last week.

When listening to the music played by these select few, it is easy to forget they are children. They are not professional musicians but students at a summer school for musicians. That is something that the Perlmans know all too well.

"We try to create a nurturing

environment that gives permission to each child to be their best and real self," Toby said, "that sounds corny, but a lot of corny things sound corny because there is a lot of truth in them." Both she and her husband stressed that, despite their musical abilities, students needed to be treated like any other child and not subjected to the rigors of professional musicianship.

The concerts, which are all open to the public, provide an opportunity for the students to exhibit their musical skills in a relaxed environment, without the stress associated with a more formal concert.

"We call this 'Works in Progress,' which implies that not everything is going to be perfect. This is not a performance, this is just something for them to try out in front of people," said Itzhak.

Despite this modesty, the performances are every bit as professional as one would expect coming from the Perlman Music Program.

During the Saturday, June 19,

concert, six students performed classical arrangements by William Walton, Francis Poulenc, Sir Edward William Elgar, Cesar Franck and Hungarian composer Bela Bartok. Each was performed with such skill and passion that the audience was repeatedly brought to rapturous applause.

The performers all played with the authority, emotion and technique of musicians far advanced in age and study. During the performance, many members of the audience closed their eyes to more fully appreciate the quality of the music being performed.

All of the students of the Summer Music School who performed at the concert had signed up to play. Itzhak said,

"We see these kids and they are absolutely amazing... there is no pressure here at all, these students are playing because they wanted to."

The concert also helps the students ease into the practice of performing live, "If you try things out in a room, you're not going to get nervous,"



ITZHAK PERLMAN leads a concert on Shelter Island last summer. heller

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- TOBY PERLMAN

said Itzhak, "but you try out something in front of three, four hundred people and the adrenaline starts to go."

"Preparation for a big stage is being familiar with getting nervous," he added, expressing the need for the students to know their own nerves and how it feels to perform in front of a large audience. By the looks

and sounds of the performances so far, the students have no problems with nerves.

"I think it's a good idea to work with students on performing in front of a crowd," said Toby.

Itzhak called the 35 students currently enrolled in the school "the future of classical music."

It's easy to forget that the performers on stage are just kids, some as young as 12 years old. "I know it sounds as if they are all professionals, but they are not. And little kids need a safe place to make a mistake," said Toby.

How young the students are becomes apparent after the show, when the dignified virtuosos that once occupied the stage change back into happy, laughing teenagers, running around and chatting like any other middle or high school student.

The transformation from child to musician and then back to child is odd to see at first; but it really speaks volumes about the Perlman Music Program, both in its musical education and, as it says in the summer music school's mission statement, its dedication to "the development of the whole person."

"They work very hard but there is a lot of positive reinforcement," said Toby, "I know [the students] have only been together for a few days, but you can already sense the friendliness the warmth, how supportive they are to one another." This group of students will spend an intensive six and a half weeks together, practicing their craft, but also socializing as a member of a new family.

Toby believes that this socialization and sense of family can help the young musicians not only grow their musical ability but their ability as humans as well.

"Once you are here you are a member of the family and they get support from everyone."

The next Works in Progress concert, featuring another six performances by the students will be held on Friday, June 25, 7:30 p.m., at The Perlman Music Program Campus located on 73 Shore Road, Shelter Island. A concert, featuring The Perlman Music Program faculty, will be held on the following day, June 26, 7 p.m. at the same location.

A special concert will be held at Sag Harbor's Old Whalers Church on Friday, August 13 at 7 p.m.