

MUSIC KEEPS THE HOVSEPIANS A FAMILY

Posted on November 18, 2015 by Keghart



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Tom Vartabedian, Belmont, MA, 16 November 2015

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"We've always been a close-knit family. But music certainly has brought us even closer together," says Ani, who owns a rich keyboard resume both here and in Armenia. "When we are not practicing, we're either talking about music, attending a concert, or planning a future event. Getting through many obstacles that the process inevitably requires has certainly been an additional binding force."

Throughout her career, Ani has appeared in piano and ensemble performances in her homeland of Armenia, along with the former Soviet Union and United States with various soloists and groups.

Prior to immigrating here in 1991, she taught at the Yerevan State Conservatory, conducted a research on Armenian-American composer Alan Hovhanness, and worked as a freelance correspondent for newspapers in Armenia.

She currently works at Brandeis University and operates a private studio in Belmont, teaching piano and music theory. In the long run, it doesn't get any better than accompanying your own son. Age aside, they consider themselves musical colleagues.

"Whether it's Haig or any other soloist, the challenges present themselves in many aspects," she

admits. "But playing with your own son is a beast of a different nature. When Haig was young, I used to feel his heartbeat when we played together. Now that he has grown older and matured as a musician, he is the one listening to my heartbeat. I'm thrilled to witness the process of reversed roles."

It isn't very often a teenager gets to play Khachaturian's Violin Concerto in Boston's Jordan Hall but that's the privilege you get at winning a prestigious Feinberg-Kelley Youth Competition. To do it, he beat out a strong group of Asians playing Dvorak and Haydn.

All this while surrounded by music and academics at Belmont High School and the New England Conservatory where Haig attends. There's never a dull moment, much less a moment. He balances it well, giving himself time to smell the roses.

Haig is also an avid saxophonist, member of the high school Wind Ensemble and prize-winning Jazz Collaborative, no stranger to pop music and occasionally pays homage to break dancing.

"I love hanging out with my friends and playing basketball with them," Haig admits. "If I have free time, I enjoy playing video games. As for break dancing, the rhythm and movement is most exciting. I have to remain still when I play violin. The opposite is true of break dancing."

At a mother-son concert in Merrimack Valley this September, the selections they performed commemorated such composers as Khachaturian, Spendiarian, Baghdasaryan, Komitas and Sardarian. Haig played them all from memory.

How does Haig take his mom when she's behind the keyboard accompanying him? Pretty much with a grain of salt.

"I may take her for granted," he points out. "I can't imagine how it would be if I didn't have her as a built-in accompanist always standing by. That makes me very fortunate."

Besides being a proud dad, Jirair doesn't sit still for a nanosecond. He's got the cameras working in overdrive. When needed, he produces CDs, DVDs, photos for auditions and competitions attended by his son.

Though he doesn't perform publically, Jirair enjoyed studying and playing the accordion as a child. He has participated in the Tekeyan Dance Group and Daron Dance Ensemble while also singing with the Komitas Choral Society under Maestro Rouben Gregorian and Jimmy Garabedian.

"It is always amazing to witness the hard labor that takes place at home and see it transformed to the stage," he confirms. "It gives me great satisfaction to see this energy brought to light for others to enjoy. Watching the audience respond gives me the utmost satisfaction and sense of pride for my family."

Jirair looks back with fondness upon his days as an engineering student at UMass/Lowell when he and colleague Ara Jeknavorian started the Armenian Club there and also launched the Lowell Tech

As a producer, his passion extended to human rights issues, specifically the Armenian Genocide, serving with the Boston Commemorative Committee. Recently, he videotaped the complete events of the centenary commemorations and aired them on BMC, making them available for cable TV networks.

"As an avid photographer, I believe that a memorable event is like a blink of an eye," he says. "It instantly becomes history if not preserved by the blink of the camera."

This past summer proved an impeccable moment for Haig. He received an invitation to participate at the world-renowned Summer Festival at Tanglewood. Next to his debut as orchestra soloist last spring and becoming a finalist in the prestigious Boston Symphony Orchestra competition, this was the adagio in his personal symphony.

On the other hand, how could he forget the performance on the stage of the Koussevitzky Shed before 8,000 listeners? The resume keeps growing.

"Next morning Haig woke up and went right back to practicing," Jirair added. "Nothing really changed. It was all in a day's work."

Becoming a professional musician and traveling the world with his violin has always remained Haig's biggest dream. After graduating from high school, he plans to move on to a school where he can continue mastering the skills of music interpretation.

"Historically, Armenians were always known to the world as the greatest translators which is the same as interpreters," Haig notes. "Learning to play music is like learning to speak many languages at once. The more of them I speak, the more audiences I can communicate with."

The family ties extend to a violin-playing grandmother named Anahit Tsitsikian who has provided her own inspiration. But even she must play second fiddle to the inimitable Sergey Khachatryan, not only Haig's absolute favorite but indeed a role model.

"He's also fearless when it comes to performing, driving race cars or exploring new ideas," says Haig. "I admire those qualities in him. I hope that someday I have the honor of playing with him."

The challenges have been innumerable. Finding the right teacher. Maintaining reasonable balance between school work and practicing. Juggling between the violin and saxophone. Coordinating complex schedules at Belmont High and the Conservatory, not to mention the travel, lessons and recitals -- rain or shine. The motivation becomes self-induced when you pursue success.

"Regardless, it all becomes worth it," agrees Jirair. "The world would be a different place without people carrying this ancient, unique and original form of art in an age of robotics and technology."

As Ani sees it, "We love it. We love what we do and do what we love. It doesn't get much better than

