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MUSIC CENTER, INC.

THE EAST HARLEM PUBLIC SCHOOL
VIOLIN PROGRAM

4/21/98

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Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras

Executive Director

Eric M. Gribin

Dear Mrs. Meyer:

Kim Henry of your office
called this morning requesting
another package about OPUS 118.

We are busy planning our next
Fiddlefest Concert which will be
outdoors in Central Park on Saturday,
September 5th.

We would be honored if the
First Lady & President Clinton
would join us.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Eric M. Gribin

210 East 86th Street
Suite 401
New York, NY 10028
Tel. (212) 396-3168
Fax (212) 396-3179

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Noa -

Pls. call & ask
them for an
add'l plet of
material. I
promised to send
them to Debbie
for consideration
at the ^{the} ~~Soros~~ ^{Hurley}

Project.

Thorp

~~D~~

New #

P6/(b)(6)

[001]

OPUS 118

212 396-3168
fax 212 396-3177

Roberta

P6/(b)(6)

Susan Kaplan
Four Oaks Foundation

P6/(b)(6)

Opus 118 Music Center, Inc.
The East Harlem Violin Program

210 East 86th Street
Suite 401
New York, NY 1002
Tel. (212) 396-3168
Fax: (212) 396-3179

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January 20, 1998

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Ms. Noa Meyer

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Dear Noa:

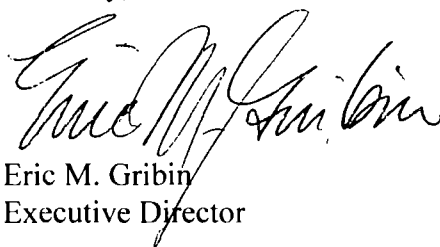
As you requested, we herewith sending you information about Opus 118 - The East Harlem Violin Program. Enclosed, is the 77-minute Academy Award-nominated film "Small Wonders" and a 13 minute tape of highlights of this film. We have also included some articles and our brochure.

If Bobbie Green is meeting with the Soros Foundation, please let her know that we are very glad to hear of her interest in the violin program and we look forward to speaking with her about her meeting.

We are now expanding the violin program to serve many more New York City public school children, and we would be grateful for any help your office can give us.

Thank you again for your interest in Opus 118.

Sincerely,



Eric M. Gribin
Executive Director

EMG/ab

cc: Susan Kaplan

Board of Advisors

Jon Diamond
Chairperson

Edward Eichler

Richard Gelman

Susan Kaplan

Nan Newton

Bob Oxnam

Victor Palmieri

Harvey Schulman

Artistic Director

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras

Executive Director

Eric M. Gribin



The East Harlem Public School Violin Program

Opus 118 Music Center, Inc.

MISSION STATEMENT

Opus 118 Music Center stands for the idea that music must be an integral part of every child's education. As Deborah Meier, former principal of the three East Harlem schools involved in the violin program, said "One way we grapple with ideas is through the arts. A school that has ignored the artist in us has done damage." Learning a musical instrument has benefits beyond the mastery of technical skills; it teaches listening, concentration, discipline, cooperation, and high standards. Significant research suggests that it develops basic intelligence. Itzhak Perlman has said, "A program such as this gives our children the very skills necessary to cope with the problems for the future. It produces not just violinists, but doctors and lawyers as well. It teaches that the foundation of excellence is perseverance."

Opus 118 is committed to:

- 1) maintaining music and art as integral components in the three East Harlem public schools in District 4 where it resides.
- 2) providing an internship mentoring program to train more teachers so that the program can be expanded.
- 3) expanding opportunities in District 4 and providing support for other public schools elsewhere that want to create their own music programs.

The East Harlem Public School Violin Program has been an inspiration, nationally and internationally. It is an example of what is possible to achieve with children of diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds when there is a collaboration between well-trained teachers and a supportive community.

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras

Born in 1947, Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras grew up in a working-class family in Rome, New York. She began to play the violin in her public elementary school, and went on to earn degrees at the State University of New York at Fredonia and Boston University School of Fine Arts. In 1980 Guaspari-Tzavaras, then a single mother of two young boys, moved to New York City. She chose to live within the community where she would work, making her home on East 118th street in East Harlem. There she raised two sons, now college age, and later adopted a daughter from El Salvador.

Guaspari-Tzavaras' program at River East School and Central Park East Schools in East Harlem is unique. Such is the quality of her teaching that dozens of her students have gone on to perform with New York's InterSchool Orchestras and with the New York Youth Symphony. Many are accepted at the La Guardia High School of Performing Arts and the Juilliard School's Music Advancement Program for promising young minority musicians. Countless others have felt the joy and fulfillment of musical expression. Not only do they play well - in tune, in time, with musicality, and verve - but they have been changed by the experience.

In 1990 the New York City Board of Education announced \$500 million in budget cuts for the 1991-1992 school year. Guaspari-Tzavaras' position was eliminated. Since she had tenure, she could have gone to work at a different school as a general music teacher but she decided she must continue to serve her students in the community setting the magnet schools created. "One way or another, I am going to keep doing what I do best - teach violin," she said. She felt that her own public-school music education was a "gift" that she wanted to give back."

Working with parents, teachers, and other volunteers, Guaspari-Tzavaras created the Opus 118 Music Center Inc., a nonprofit corporation that raises funds to support her program.

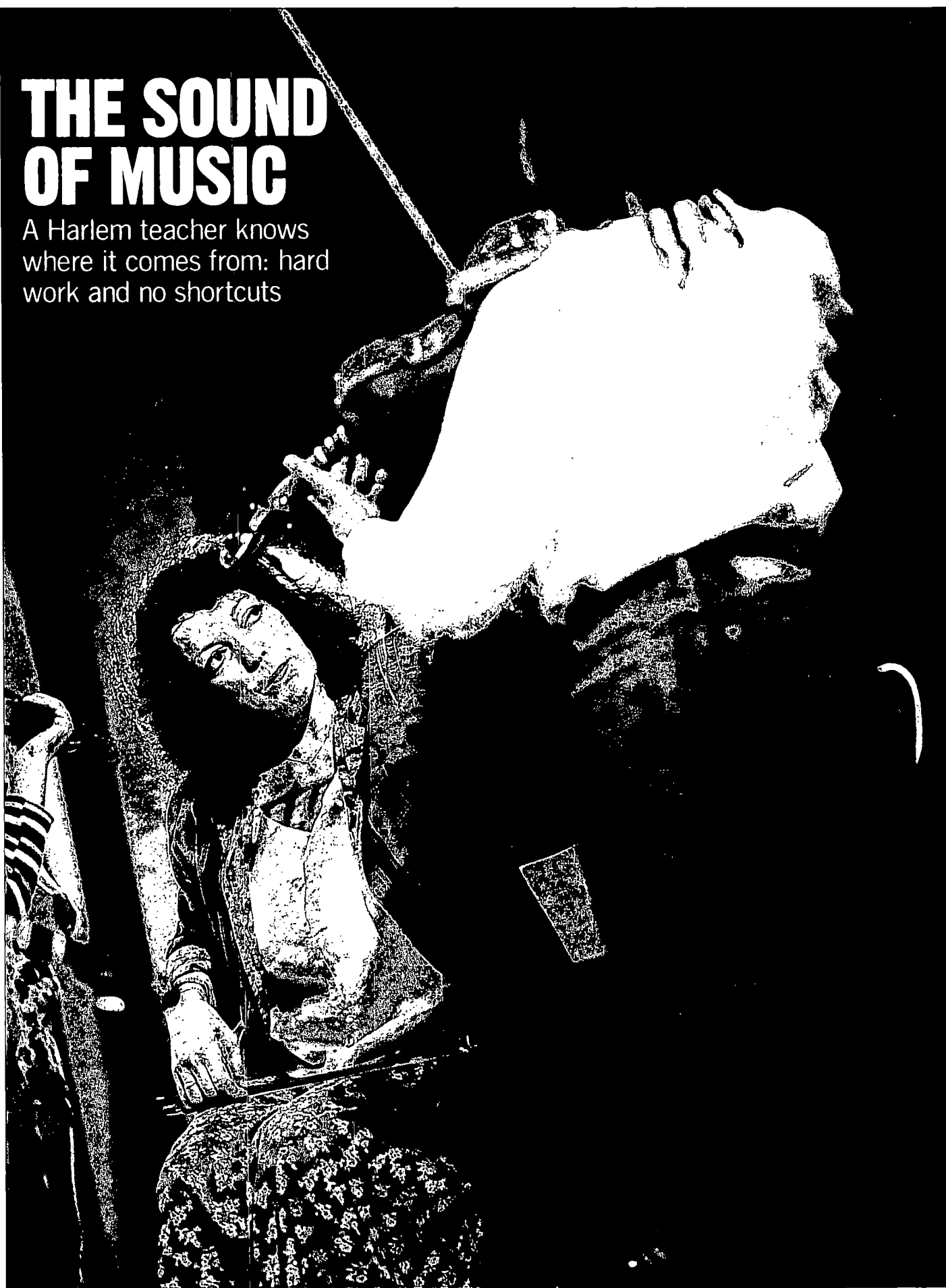
Ms. Guaspari-Tzavaras teaches a three week seminar on "Violin in the classroom" for the Summer Musicorda Program at Mount Holyoke College.

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras has been the recipient of several awards, including: The Petra Foundation annual award, a national award which "supports unsung individuals who are making distinctive contributions to human freedom"; a "Hero for Today" award, from the Reader's Digest Foundation; and in 1995, one of CBS-TV's "Woman of the Year" awards. She has appeared in the national media on several occasions, including CBS' Sunday Morning, NBC's Today Show, in an interview with Tom Brokaw, to name but a few.

Since 1993 Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras has led two "Fiddlefest" benefit concerts in New York and one in Zurich, Switzerland. During these concerts the East Harlem students share the stage with Isaac Stern, Mark O'Connor, Itzhak Perlman, Arnold Steinhardt, Midori, and others. Each of these events was received with great enthusiasm by the audience and media.

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

A Harlem teacher knows where it comes from: hard work and no shortcuts



A "I train the students like you would an athlete," says Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras (at New York City's River East Elementary School).

A dedicated teacher asks as much as she gives

ROBERTA GUASPARI-TZAVARAS takes teaching very, very seriously, and she doesn't hesitate to let students know it. "Adam!" she chides a young pupil at Harlem's River East Elementary School who has worn cowboy boots to class. "I've

told you those boots look slippery. *Don't wear those on violin days!*" Another second grader provokes Guaspari-Tzavaras's most mortifying reproach of the day: "I've told you time and time again, Kenny: You cannot play the violin with those long nails!"

► Students took part in a 1993 concert featuring Itzhak Perlman (left) and Isaac Stern.



▼ "[The violin] is always in my heart, just like my father . . . ever since he died," says student Jose Rojas, 9).



On the spot she produces a pair of clippers from her knapsack.

Despite such rigor, none of Guaspari-Tzavaras's 150 students seem to regard her as the Violin Teacher from Hell. On the contrary, her innovative East Harlem Violin Program, which provides free-of-charge violin instruction at three New York City public elementary schools, attracts so many eager applicants that Guaspari-Tzavaras, 49, holds a lottery each year to keep classes a manageable size. "I know she's a tough teacher," explains 9-year-old Jose Rojas. "But it's for my own good."

That kind of attitude might seem rare in a grade school student, but Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras—the subject of an Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Small Wonders*—is an uncommonly determined teacher. Squirming beginners are required to spend two hours a week working just on posture and form, while students at higher levels snap to attention and play a Vivaldi double concerto. Declares Guaspari-Tzavaras: "Music is as important as learning to read and write. It exercises their brains. There's this wonderful feeling of pride and empowerment."

And those empowered become eager mentors. "Someone may be having trouble with their bow, and the second-year kid will go right over," says Guaspari-Tzavaras. "They love it! And it reinforces what I've taught."

What she teaches has been accomplished against all odds. In 1991, New York City's financially strapped Board of Education eliminated all art and music programs in the schools, costing Guaspari-Tzavaras her job. Undaunted, she organized a fund-raising group called Opus 118 Music Center (after the address of her townhouse on East Harlem's 118th Street), which pays for violins and her own \$50,000 salary. Then, last month, some 70 violins and cellos were destroyed when violent rains flooded a school closet where they were stored. "I'm fighting all the time," says the beleaguered teacher.

Her passion for music began at a public elementary school in a working-class neighborhood of Rome, N.Y. The oldest child of Assunta Guaspari, a now retired kitchen worker, and her husband, Guy, who died in a 1974 factory accident, Roberta began studying violin in fourth grade. She eventually graduated with a music education degree from the State University of New York at Fredonia in



▲ "Being a mother is probably what I'm most proud of," says Guaspari-Tzavaras (at home with Nicholas, Alexi and Sophia).

1969. While working on her master's at Boston University, she met George Tzavaras, a Navy officer studying at MIT. "I was 24, Italian and not married," she says. "The pressure was on from my family." They wed in 1971.

As George rose through Navy ranks—with postings in Honolulu and Newport, R.I.—the family was always on the move. Teaching violin and persuading school administrators to invest in musical instruments proved a dauntingly tough career choice, especially after the birth of the couple's two sons. (Nicholas, now 21, studies cello at the New England Conservatory of Music, and Alexi, 19, is an Amherst College sophomore.) Finally, when the family moved to Greece in 1977, Roberta devised a solution. Withdrawing \$5,000 from the family savings, she bought 50 tiny violins and persuaded the headmas-

ter of the British-run Campion School to hire her. No sooner had Guaspari-Tzavaras established herself there than George asked for a divorce. "It was the lowest point of my life," she says.

But Guaspari-Tzavaras rebounded. With her sons—and violins—in tow, she moved to New York City in 1980, subletting an East Harlem apartment from a couple whose children attended Central Park East schools, a city-run alternative program. That led to an introduction to the school's music-loving principal, Deborah Meier, and a part-time job. Three years later, when she was hired full-time, Guaspari-Tzavaras had fallen in love again—this time with her gritty new neighborhood, where she lovingly restored the townhouse she lives in with Sophia, a 5-year-old from El Salvador, whom she adopted in 1991. "My mother really *needs* to come

home and be a mother," says Alexi. "She is just as passionate about mothering as she is about teaching."

And there are those who are passionate about her. In 1993, world-class violinists, including Itzhak Perlman and Arnold Steinhardt, helped organize a Carnegie Hall benefit concert that raised nearly \$300,000 for her program. "This woman has an incredible, demonic amount of energy," says violin virtuoso Isaac Stern. "She draws things out of the kids. And from her they gain a sense of self." That's certainly true for Guaspari-Tzavaras alum Melia Crumbley, 15. When kids who hang out on the street mock her for spending so much time practicing, says Melia, "I just look them right back in the eye and say, 'What are you doing with *your* life?'"

■ PATRICK ROGERS

■ ELIZABETH MULLEN in New York City

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fiddlefest

Julius

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL FIRST PRIZE GOLD HUGO AWARD BEST DOCUMENTARY

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FROM THE ACADEMY AWARD WINNING TEAM OF
FROM MAO TO MOZART: ISAAC STERN IN CHINA

fIDDLEFEST

ROBERTA GUASPARI-TZAVARAS AND HER EAST HARLEM VIOLIN PROGRAM



F I D D L

ROBERTA GUASPARI-TZAVARAS AND



Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras instructing her beginner student Jose Miguel Rojas how to hold the violin.

*"Roberta instills a lot of enthusiasm
and the results are spectacular."*

—Itzhak Perlman



Arnold Steinhardt of the Guarneri String Quartet
congratulating Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras.

Itzhak Perlman, Aurora Noe Barnes, Isaac Stern, Emilia Maynard, performing the B. Double Concerto on the stage of Carnegie Hall.



Photo by: Jett Christensen

*"It's a joyous film,
a reminder that we're all
meant to be artists. This film
is a wake-up call that needs
widespread attention."*

—Deborah Meier,

Senior Fellow, Annenberg Institute for Social Reform

FIRST PRIZE CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
GOLD HUGO AWARD • BEST DOCUMENTARY

*"We're all here tonight because we have a bigger mission,
to take the magical spirit of tonight's concert with us out into the world
and fight for music and art to be a part of every child's education. Thank you."*

—Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras, "FIDDLEFEST"

FEST

THE EAST HARLEM VIOLIN PROGRAM

ROBERTA GUASPARI-TZAVARAS was voted WOMAN OF THE YEAR in 1994 by *CBS This Morning*, and was given the UNSUNG HERO AWARD by the Petra Foundation; THE HEROES FOR TODAY AWARD by *Reader's Digest* and the OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD by SUNY Fredonia Alumni Association. She has been featured on *Prime Time Live*, *The Sunday Morning Show with Charles Kuralt*, *The Today Show*, *Nightly News with Tom Brokaw*, *Showbiz Today*, WCBS, WABC, WWOR-TV, BBC Radio, NPR, as well as in *Life Magazine*, *The New York Times* and *The Daily News*.



Advanced student Emma Sacks helps beginner Sam George in the classroom.

Filmed over a period of two years by the creators of the Academy Award winning team of "FROM MAO TO MOZART: ISAAC STERN IN CHINA,"

FIDDLEFEST follows

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras and her students from the schools and streets of East Harlem, to Madison Square Garden, and ultimately to the stage of Carnegie Hall where they performed with Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Midori, Arnold Steinhardt and great violinists from the classical, jazz and country music worlds.

In 1980, Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras began the East Harlem Violin Program in three alternative elementary schools with a vision of inner-city youngsters developing self-esteem and discipline through rigorous instruction and uncompromising standards. When her position was suddenly eliminated by the Board of Education during the budget cuts of 1990, Ms. Guaspari-Tzavaras set about to raise her own funds to keep the program going.

FIDDLEFEST follows Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras in her single-minded efforts on behalf of the East Harlem Violin Program. Students graduate from her program at a high level of achievement and have been enthusiastically welcomed into the city's top high school music programs. It is so popular with children and parents that admission to the program is determined by lottery.

Director/Editor: ALLAN MILLER

Allan Miller has produced and directed over 35 films and television programs around the world. Two of his films have won Academy Awards: "FROM MAO TO MOZART: ISAAC STERN IN CHINA," and "THE BOLERO" with Zubin Mehta and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Other award winning films include "MEMORIES OF EUBIE," with Eubie Blake, "A HUNGRY FEELING: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF BRENDAN BEHAN," "HIGH FIDELITY: THE ADVENTURES OF THE GUARNERI STRING QUARTET," "JOHN CAGE: I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY AND I AM SAYING IT," "NOVEMBER'S CHILDREN: REVOLUTION IN PRAGUE," "ORPHEUS IN THE REAL WORLD: 26 MUSICIANS, 26 CONDUCTORS," with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and "FIDDLEFEST: ROBERTA GUASPARI-TZAVARAS AND HER EAST HARLEM VIOLIN PROGRAM."

Mr. Miller was founder and conductor of the Late Late Concerts at Lincoln Center, Educational Conductor of the Baltimore Symphony, Associate Conductor of the Denver Symphony, and guest conductor of a number of orchestras around the country. He is President and Founding Artistic Director of Symphony Space, a Performing Arts Center on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in New York City.



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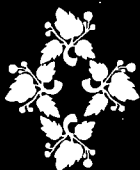
402 est, rue Notre-Dame, Montréal, Québec H2Y1C8 Téléphone: (514) 844-3358 Fax: (514) 844-7298

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:

Walter Scheuer's involvement in film began in 1979 when Isaac Stern was invited by the People's Republic of China to tour China. This event led to the production of the Academy Award winning "FROM MAO TO MOZART: ISAAC STERN IN CHINA." Additionally, Mr Scheuer has collaborated with Allan Miller as an Executive Producer on such films as: "A HUNGRY FEELING: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF BRENDAN BEHAN," "HIGH FIDELITY: THE ADVENTURES OF THE GUARNERI STRING QUARTET," "NOVEMBER'S CHILDREN: REVOLUTION IN PRAGUE," and "FIDDLEFEST: ROBERTA GUASPARI-TZAVARAS AND HER EAST HARLEM VIOLIN PROGRAM."

PRODUCER:

Susan Kaplan is the President of NewCity Productions, a full-service production facility. Since its inception in 1993, Ms. Kaplan has been producing "FIDDLEFEST: ROBERTA GUASPARI-TZAVARAS AND HER EAST HARLEM VIOLIN PROGRAM," while also directing and producing award-winning fundraising videos and promotional spots. Before NewCity Productions, she was an Associate Producer and Assistant Editor on several of Walter Scheuer and Allan Miller's documentaries: "JOHN CAGE: I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY AND I'M SAYING IT," "NOVEMBER'S CHILDREN: REVOLUTION IN PRAGUE," and "KURT MASUR: MAESTRO BETWEEN TWO WORLDS."



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THE FOUR OAKS FOUNDATION
635 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
Telephone: (212) 753-9630
Fax: (212) 371-2825

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402 est, rue Notre-Dame
Montréal, Québec H2Y1C8
Téléphone: (514) 844-3358
Fax: (514) 844-7298

fIDDLEFEST

Directed and Edited by ALLAN MILLER Produced by SUSAN KAPLAN
Cinematography by KRAMER MORGENTHAU Co-Editor DONALD KLOCEK Assistant Editor/Post Production Manager NAN STRAUSS

June 26, 1997

Fact Sheet of "FIDDLEFEST" Carnegie Hall

Information

Dates: November 9 or 11, 1998

Participating Artists:

Gilles Apap (gypsy fiddle) confirmed and available Nov 9 and 11/1998

Pamela Frank (classical violin) ?

Allison Kraus (country violin)???

Yo-Yo Ma (cello) ? ? ?

Diane Monroe (jazz / classical violin) confirmed and available Nov 9 and 11/1998

Marc O'Connor (country fiddle) confirmed and available Nov. 9 and 11/1998

Arnold Steinhardt (classical violin) confirmed and available Nov 9 and 11/1998

Isaac Stern (classical violin) ?

Maxim Vengerov (classical violin) confirmed and available Nov 9 and 11/1998

Pinchas Zukerman (classical violin) confirmed and available only Nov 11/1998

20 violin students from Switzerland

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras and her East Harlem violin students

Master of ceremony: Bill Cosby, Harry Belafonte, or Wynton Marsalis
???

Sponsors:

AT&T

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Swiss Air

N2K pending

The proceeds of all "Fiddlefest" benefit concerts go directly into a special permanent fund to assure the violin teacher's position for the East Harlem Violin Program.

A Violin Teacher's Unstrung Heroes

Flooding Adds Unhappy Coda To 'Small Wonders' Tale

By Richard Harrington
Washington Post Staff Writer

Just as the film "Small Wonders" is being released nationally, disaster has struck the highly acclaimed violin program in East Harlem that the movie celebrates.

Director Allan Miller's documentary, which opened yesterday at the Cineplex Odeon Dupont Circle 5, is a moving testament to artistic survival. It is the story of how Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras's East Harlem Public School Violin Program, involving mostly minority first- and second-grade students, is saved from extinction after the city's Board of Education eliminated its funding in 1991.

"Small Wonders" follows the program from the lottery by which its 150 students are selected to a Carnegie Hall fund-raiser that concludes with students and masters joined in an emotionally wrenching performance of Bach's Double Violin Concerto. The focus of the film, however, is on Guaspari-Tzavaras's interactions with her young pupils as they are introduced to their instruments and begin an apprenticeship that is about much more than music.



BY KEITH JENKINS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras and Jose Miguel Rojas, stars of the documentary on her East Harlem music program.

But in a twist that even these filmmakers could not have envisioned, all the program's violins and cellos were destroyed last weekend when torrential rains flooded the school's violin closet. Guaspari-Tzavaras said that some 70 instruments that had recently been donated were ruined. Because the Board of Education is so financially strapped, there was no insurance, she said.

"There's no money to replace them," said a crushed Guaspari-Tzavaras, who must deal with the \$50,000 of damage on top of routine struggles to keep her pro-

See MUSIC, C6, Col. 1

Washington Post
Oct. 26 / 96

Silenced Violins

MUSIC, From C1

gram alive. For now, classes for new students are on hold.

As she did in 1991, Guaspari-Tzavaras has turned to the public, looking for emergency funding or donated violins. "Eighth-sized, quarter-sized, half-sized, we can use *anything*," she said with a mixture of sadness and resilience. "Small Wonders" suggests it's that spirit that will triumph, as it has in the past.

Taking It From the Top

Each fall, a notice is sent to the parents of first- and second-graders at three East Harlem elementary schools. It describes the violin program—which is open to everyone, without auditions. Because there are generally three times as many applicants as class places, the names are put in a sack and about 50 are picked out. Guaspari-Tzavaras never sees the youngsters before meeting them in their first class.

"Small Wonders" captures one of these early introductions and focuses on several students, both in and out of class. One of them is Jose Rojas, who accompanied Guaspari-Tzavaras to Washington recently to promote the film. Jose, who was 5 when the movie was being filmed, made up his mind to study the violin at age 4 after watching Guaspari-Tzavaras and her students rehearsing for a recital at his school.

"I liked the beat, it was getting into my head and I was getting the rhythm of it," said Jose, now one of the most self-possessed 9-year-olds you're ever likely to meet.

When Jose came home that day, recalls mother America Rojas, who accompanied him to Washington, "He told me and my husband, 'I like the way that lady plays. I'm gonna play just like her.' I thought he was kidding."

Guaspari-Tzavaras had operated the violin program through the school system between 1983 and 1991, when her job was "excessed." Desperate to keep the program, she wrote to the media for help, as well as to violinists living in the New York area. "Come to our school, come to a class," she pleaded. "Just come and *hear* these kids and help us save this violin program."

One of the stories about their plight caught the eye and ear of violinist Itzhak Perlman, who turned on his TV one night after a concert to hear some of Guaspari-Tzavaras's older students rehearsing one of Bach's "Brandenburg" Concertos.

"He called me the next day and said, 'This is Itzhak Perlman. I heard your kids on TV last night and they sounded great,'" Guaspari-Tzavaras recalled. "I

was blown away that he would even call, but then he said, 'What can I do to help?'" Perlman ended up visiting the schools, offering counsel and encouragement; other individuals and organizations provided a patchwork of funding over the next two years.

In 1993, Arnold Steinhardt, a founding member of the world-renowned Guarneri String Quartet, learned that the program—which he'd heard about from Perlman and other colleagues—was once again endangered. "You would have to have a heart of stone not to be moved by what Roberta's doing and the reaction of the kids," he said this week from Colorado, where he was performing. Fortuitously, Steinhardt's wife, Dorothea Von Haeften, was on the board of the Petra Foundation, which made a grant through its *Unsung Heroes* program.

Soon after, Von Haeften went to take a picture of Guaspari-Tzavaras and made her own discovery. "Because the students are chosen by lottery, not by gift, Roberta is saying *every* child can learn to play the violin, one of the most difficult instruments around. And I was able to hear the proof."

When she got home that day, Von Haeften told Steinhardt, "You fiddlers in town better get together and do something for this other fiddler who needs help. Call Itzhak and Isaac."

"Itzhak" was Perlman, of course, and "Isaac" was Isaac Stern, and they were soon joined by Midori, Mark O'Connor, John Blake Jr. and eight others who agreed to play with the children at Carnegie Hall. "Music education and future audiences, the graying of our present audience, is on everybody's mind," Steinhardt pointed out, "so there wasn't a musician who didn't say yes."

Producer Walter Scheuer, whose documentaries include "High Fidelity" (about the Guarneri Quartet) and "From Mao to Mozart," an Oscar-winning movie about Stern's journey to China, decided to film the Carnegie Hall concert, which in turn led him and director Miller to track the entire process.

The Teacher's Way

Like Steinhardt, Guaspari-Tzavaras got her start in public school, where, as the daughter of a factory worker in Rome, N.Y., she could only afford free lessons. Unlike many violin students, Guaspari-Tzavaras did not have private teachers until she got to college. Nonetheless, her skills were so developed she was accepted into Syracuse University on a full scholarship, which lasted until then-Gov. Nelson Rockefeller drastically cut the education budget.

By then, Guaspari-Tzavaras already



BY MICHAEL P. McLAUGHLIN—MIRAMAX

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras and her charges in a scene from "Small Wonders."

knew what she wanted to do. "I wasn't sure if it would be art, music or phys ed—I enjoyed all those things. I just knew I wanted to teach."

She got her degree, but marriage to a Navy officer soon took her around the world, transience that made it difficult to land anything but substitute teaching jobs. It was in Greece that the seeds of the East Harlem program were sown when Guaspari-Tzavaras bought 50 violins, planning to rent them to students at a private school in Athens where she was teaching. A 1980 divorce brought her back to New York, where for two years she worked as a substitute and in 1983 turned three part-time positions into one full-time job.

And those 50 "terrible" violins? They were replaced eight years ago when plumbers doing repairs forgot to cap a pipe, causing a flood that left the instruments "totally soaking wet." That time, the plumbers' insurance covered the replacements.

After her teaching position was eliminated in '91, Guaspari-Tzavaras figured out a way to keep the violin program: She started a nonprofit organization to privately fund it. "It raises enough for my salary and health benefits," she said. With music and arts funding being cut everywhere, many organizations are trying to tap into the same sources. "And for some ridiculous reason, many people think that arts education is a frill, a fluff, for enjoyment," said Guaspari-Tzavaras. "Any kind of arts education that's done in a strict way, that demands something of the children, can help them even more than learning to read at a young age. It teaches them how to focus, how to study, how to think, how to figure things out."

As "Small Wonders" shows, most of the students embrace the experience ("my dream come true," says one 6-year-old). And the film shows how uncompromising Guaspari-Tzavaras can be: One child who opts for a soccer game over practice is forced to leave the program. (He was the

only one from that class who left.)

"Roberta combines a mixture of toughness and love, and each one is straight from the heart, completely," said Von Haeften. "And the kids totally trust her. She established that total trust from the beginning when you see how she molds their heads to the violin—the kids become puppets and lay in her hand, they give themselves."

Is she too strict?

"No," said Jose—but when Guaspari-Tzavaras told him he was free to say yes, that's the word he chose. "Okay, yes, she was strict, but when I got used to her stricting, didn't care. When she screamed at me or something, I just ignored it. Then she just tells me nicely."

Now Jose himself wants to be a teacher.

In fact, the boy chimed in, "about a year ago I was trying to teach my sister how to play the violin, and I was like Roberta."

"Very strict," said Guaspari-Tzavaras with a smile.

Jose added, "I can't teach my sister anymore because now she's playing the piano." His sister is 6.

The Big Time

For three years, Guaspari-Tzavaras's students have performed "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Madison Square Garden before Knicks basketball games. Perlman, a baseball and basketball fanatic with reserve seats at the Garden, arranged the first appearance, which coincided with the filming of "Small Wonders."

"It was fun," Jose said. "When I saw the players and said hi to them, they said hi back." As one student says so proudly in the film, "I played on the same court as the Knicks!"

From there, the students learned how it felt to walk onto the crowded stage at Carnegie Hall, and 12 of them got to play Bach's Double Concerto, paired off with some of the biggest names in classical music. "Small Wonders" captures the event in all its emotional glory.

Newsday Oct 4 - 96

'Small Wonders' Played Out With Violins

MOVIE REVIEW

★★½ **SMALL WONDERS.** (G) Uplifting but less than exhilarating study of Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras' pioneering violin program for children in East Harlem. With appearances by Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Michael Tree, Mark O'Connor, Midori, Arnold Steinhardt. Directed and edited by Allan Miller. 1.20. At the Cineplex Odeon Carnegie Hall, Seventh Avenue near 57th Street, Manhattan.

By John Anderson
STAFF WRITER

IN ALLAN MILLER'S Oscar-nominated "Small Wonders," we get to watch and hear an interracial army of children learning violin, playing foreign music (Bach), doing it *in school* as well as in defiance of relentless budget cutting and full-frontal assaults on the National Endowment for the Arts. Is this a personal attack on Jesse Helms?

Nothing so electrifying, unfortunately. "Small Wonders" is, however, a very pleasant film about Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras, who, in 1990, refused to give up her in-school violin program when her position was eliminated by the New York City Board of Education. Choosing instead to raise private money to keep it going, and thereby providing an invaluable service to the schoolchildren of East Harlem — invaluable if you accept, as I do, that music study is education — she now directs a program so popular there's an annual lottery for would-be violinists.

The movie relates all of this to us at the beginning, however, so the survival of the program is not at issue in the film. There is no dramatic crisis about whether strings will

stay in these particular East Harlem alternative schools, or about student interest. We watch instead the mechanics of the program — the lottery, the rehearsals, a local recital, the playing of the national anthem at a Knicks game and the climactic concert at Carnegie Hall — not all of which are so riveting or edifying.

Guaspari-Tzavaras herself, however, is a somewhat startling figure. Although obviously aware of Miller's camera — she plays to it, or away from it — she comes off as an uncompromising disciplinarian with a rigorous, no-nonsense approach to playing the violin: If you can't devote yourself to the instrument — practice, make rehearsals, don't make excuses — then you don't belong in her class. Yes, she's blunt and occasionally unpleasant: One girl, who chooses a soccer game over a concert rehearsal, is summarily banished from the concert. Those who feel that teachers have gotten soft and undemanding should check out Guaspari-Tzavaras.

But she's also devoted to her program and her students, and it shows. And when they do mount the stage at Carnegie Hall — along with such eminent fiddlers as Isaac Stern, Midori, Michael Tree, Arnold Steinhardt and Itzhak Perlman — there is real electricity and little doubt that her students are getting something special and life-affirming out of an education system that so often fails.

"Small Wonders" is, of course, a propaganda film, one as uncompromising as its subject about the value of arts funding in the schools. But when you consider that this is a country that never cuts football but always cuts music, this film should be required viewing. ■



Miramax Photo; Michael E. McLaughlin
Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras and her students in "Small Wonders"

Swissair Sponsors Young Musicians

"Fiddlefest" in Zurich

As part of its continuing commitment to transcending boundaries in every way, Swissair is flying 40 talented young violinists free of charge from New York to Switzerland, where they will perform a violin concert at Zurich's Tonhalle on Sunday, January 19 along with 40 Swiss counterparts and music greats such as Isaac Stern, David Zinman, Arnold Steinhardt and Heinrich Schiff. The Americans are students of Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras' "East Harlem Violin Program," which she began in 1980 to benefit socially disadvantaged young musical talent. Allan Miller, Academy Award-winning director of *From Mao to Mozart* (starring Stern), has made a movie about Guaspari-Tzavaras' work, called *Fiddlefest*. The film, which will soon be coming to Swiss theaters, has already won several awards, including an Oscar nomination for best documentary. Advance tickets for the concert are available from the Tonhalle box office, tel. +41 1 206 34 34, fax +41 1 206 34 69.

Désireuse d'abolir les frontières, Swissair offre un aller retour New York-Zurich à 40 violonistes âgés de 8 à 21 ans. Le 19 janvier, ces jeunes talents participeront à un concert donné à la Tonhalle de Zurich, avec 40 violonistes suisses en herbe et des figures du monde musical telles qu'Isaac Stern, David Zinman, Arnold Steinhardt ou encore Heinrich Schiff.

Les jeunes Américains suivent l'enseignement de l'East Harlem Violin Program, dirigé et fondé en 1980 par Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras à l'intention des enfants issus de milieux défavorisés. Une initiative fixée sur la pellicule par Allan Miller, égale-



ment réalisateur de *From Mao to Mozart*. Bientôt dans nos salles obscures, *Fiddlefest* a déjà été salué par la critique, qui l'a notamment nommé à l'Oscar du meilleur documentaire. Vous pouvez réserver vos billets de concert à la Tonhalle: tél. +41 1

206 34 34, fax +41 1 206 34 69.

In ihrem Bestreben, in jeder Beziehung Grenzen zu überschreiten, fliegt die Swissair 40 talentierte junge

Violinisten kostenlos von New York nach Zürich, wo sie am 19. Januar zusammen mit 40 Schweizer Jungtalenten sowie Musikgrößen wie Isaac Stern, David Zinman, Arnold Steinhardt und Heinrich Schiff in der Tonhalle ein Konzert geben werden.

Die jungen Amerikaner sind Schüler des «East Harlem Violin»-Programms, das 1980 mit dem Ziel, sozial benachteiligte musikalische Jungtalente zu fördern, initiiert wurde. Das Wirken der Gründerin, Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras, hat Allan Miller, Regisseur von «From Mao to Mozart», in seinem Film «Fiddlefest» dokumentiert. Der Film, der neu in die Kinos kommt, hat auch bereits Auszeichnungen erhalten, unter anderem eine Oscar-Nomination für den besten Dokumentarfilm.

Tickets für das Konzert können bei der Tonhalle, Tel. +41 1 206 34 34, Fax +41 1 206 34 69, bestellt werden.



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tive stamp in March. Swissair itself has slated a specific anniversary merchandising program, which will include the reissue of a prizewinning poster and the production of a special Swissair edition DC-4 aviation watch. "Spirit of Swissair," made by the Dufeau watch company.

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Brochures are available for the respective flights to New York, Cairo, Salzburg or Prague.

Switzerland and the Alpine World

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If you're due for a vacation, Swissair's new winter brochure, *Switzerland and the Alpine World*, may be just what you need to get started planning it. Whether your budget is tight or the sky's the limit, you're sure to find a package plan that's just right for you.

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will receive a voucher booklet, entitled "Special Snow Discounts," absolutely free.

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mesure. Hôtel de luxe, appartement ou auberge de jeunesse, à vous de choisir. Vous êtes branché culture? ou plutôt gastronomie? A moins que votre mot d'ordre ne soit le repos? Qu'à cela ne tienne! L'éventail de nos offres ne manque pas de largeur.

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«Switzerland and the Alpine World»

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Soll's ein Luxushotel, ein Appartement oder die Jugendherberge sein? Sind Sie Kulturliebhaber oder eher auf Gaudenfreuden eingestellt? ...oder gar beides? Sie werden finden, was Sie suchen! Ist Wintersport Ihre Stärke? Wenn ja, die Alpen haben alles zu bieten, was das Herz begehrt, und Sie brauchen noch nicht mal Ihre Ausrüstung mitzubringen. Dank «swissrent a sport» wartet bereits alles, was Sie brauchen, am Ankunftsort.

In der Schweiz voranzukommen ist kein Problem: Die Verkehrsbetriebe bieten Pauschalbillette an, die Fahrten mit Zug, Bus, Tram, Schiff und vielen Bergbahnen enthalten. Und sollten Sie «genug» von der Schweiz haben, dann wären da ja noch die Nachbarländer Frankreich, Deutschland Österreich und Italien. Und wo man da am besten hingeht, erfahren Sie ebenfalls aus der neuen Winterbroschüre.

Die Broschüre «Switzerland and the Alpine World» können Sie bei jedem Swissair-Büro bestellen. Und wenn Sie eines der Arrangements buchen, erhalten Sie erst noch das «Special Snow Discounts»-Bonheft... gratis, wohlverstanden!

BY LINE

ARNOLD STEINHARDT

For the Yearbook

WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD, Mr. Singer, the local elementary school music teacher, knocked on our door. Would young Arnold like to play in the orchestra? But which instrument, how to find one, and who would teach it? Not to worry, he said. The school provided a variety of instruments, a two dollar deposit secured the chosen one and Mr. Singer himself taught them all. And so, with great excitement, I started playing the violin in the school orchestra.

After it was discovered that I had a musical gift, private lessons were in order, but the public schools until the end of high school provided me with a basic musical education. Recently, I came across my junior high school yearbook, *La Cronica*, dated winter, 1950. Thumbing through it, I was astonished at the number of musical activities my school offered. There were the photos of the patriotic committee and bugle corps, the band, junior and senior choir and junior and senior orchestra. We in the senior orchestra performed yearly alongside other California school orchestras in statewide competitions. States across the country deemed that along with the three R's, every student should be exposed to a variety of activities; and so I made my frog in pottery class, a ping pong table in Mr. Allen's wood shop (which my son and I still play on) and played the violin in Mr. Ives's orchestra.

No one has to be told how badly schools have decayed as we head into the year 2000. The press is full of horror stories: more budget cuts, larger classes, fewer courses, guns everywhere. And with budget cuts, the first things to go seem to be art and music programs. Schools used to provide a fertile soil in which future

music lovers and performers could grow; they were to the concert hall what farm clubs are to the majors. As a performer, I worry that concert halls will be dark in the twenty-first century.

This was on my mind when colleagues told me about a remarkable public school violin teacher, Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras, and her violin program in East Harlem. I visited Roberta in the River East public school where she was working with a large class of youngsters. Her approach to teaching, her commitment, energy, and the enthusiasm of her students was unforgettable. For 13 years she has been teaching violin in three New York City elementary schools. Her violin lessons have a phenomenal impact on the lives of these East Harlem pupils. Working with Roberta, they gain self-esteem, concentration, cooperation, respect for one another, commitment, and love for music.

Fellow teachers tell me that the children who are in Roberta's violin program excel in their academic studies. In these three schools, so many want to enter that only 50 percent of the children can be accepted and places in the program are won by lottery.

I am shocked that today, Roberta is the only remaining full-time violin teacher in the entire New York City public school system. The funding for her program was cut four years ago. Working with parents, teachers, and other volunteers, Roberta Tzavaras created the Op. 118 Music Center, a non-profit organization that raises funds to support her program.

Leaving that East River classroom, I was overwhelmed by what Roberta's students seemed to be saying proudly, exultantly: I am learning to play the violin and if I can do that I can do anything. Something had to be done to

help her remarkable program and I thought of a benefit concert. A concert given by violinists and for violinists. My wife, Dorothea, and I asked a group of distinguished violinists including Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Midori, and country fiddler Mark O'Connor and jazz fiddlers to join Roberta and her youngsters at Carnegie Hall in October, 1993.

The joy, excitement and pride of her students as they strode on stage was palpable and there were few dry eyes in the house as the kids and professionals joined forces to finish the concert with Bach's Concerto for Two Violins in A Minor. The creators of this inspirational event, the musicians, Carnegie Hall, the philanthropist Walter Scheuer, many individual donors, and a sold-out house of listeners had all been moved to action by the dismal state of public school music and the need to do something about it.

Leafing through my old yearbook, wonderful memories of orchestra class drifted back- Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, Morton Gould's *American Patrol*, Mr. Ives conducting the annual April Fool's concert. We loved it. We were the lucky ones and so are Roberta Tzavaras's kids.

Roberta Tzavaras is a symbol for the healing and educational power of music. She is the Statue of Liberty. Except Roberta isn't standing in the Bay of New York holding a torch. She has her feet firmly planted in East Harlem as she beckons lovingly to her children, clutching a violin and bow in her raised hand.

Arnold Steinhardt is First Violinist of the Guarneri String Quartet. He chaired a second large-scale fundraising effort for the Opus 118 Music Center, culminating in Fiddlefest II, a benefit featuring Itzhak Perlman and friends in concert with East Harlem Violin Program students at Alice Tully Hall May 31, 1995.

Letter From Carnegie Hall

Dear readers,

Walking up 57th Street one evening in late October on the way to the Russian Tea Room, I passed the comedian Jackie Mason, who was haranguing and entertaining passing pedestrians. This seemed like an auspicious way to begin my experience of Fiddlefest: New York as a wild, enchanted place where strange and wonderful things happen.

I was going to Fiddlefest as an observer, but I was as excited as if I were going to perform. Imagine, a concert featuring Itzhak Perlman, Isaac Stern, Midori, Ani and Ida Kavafian, Arnold Steinhardt, Michael Tree, Mark O'Connor, John Blake, Jr., Karen Briggs, and Diane Monroe, among others.

The house was packed for the benefit, which raised \$750,000 for Opus 118, East Harlem's public school violin program, and Link Up!, Carnegie Hall's educational

outreach program. The amazing success of violinist and teacher Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras and her students, in the face of budget cuts that have wiped out string instruction in New York City's public schools, was the major theme and *raison d'être* of this event.

After a delicious preconcert dinner at the Russian Tea Room (I could write a few pages of praise just about the caviar and sour cream *blini*), the concert was set to begin. Up first were Guaspari-Tzavaras and her 35 or so students. Incredible! These kids, aged six to 13, played wonderfully. Two Bach minuets and a Telemann *sinfonia* sounded marvelously musical, in tune, with fine dynamics and great tone. The kids played with perfect form, bows all moving together, and great rhythm and articulation. Very moving.

Jazz pianist Billy Taylor was the master of ceremonies and was an inspired choice. Taylor travels easily between musical

worlds and has always been an advocate of strings in jazz, from his work with jazz violinist Joe Kennedy to his recent outings with the Turtle Island String Quartet.

Next up were Isaac Stern and Midori, playing one of those beautiful Leclair duets. It struck me that there was something simple, pure and perennial going on here, with two people playing beautiful melodies on two violins. In this case it just happened that they were two of the world's greatest violinists performing at Carnegie Hall. But the intimacy and joy were what one really felt.

Maintaining and deepening this feeling were the Guarneri String Quartet's Michael Tree and Arnold Steinhardt, playing a handful of Bartók's violin duets. These are wonderful pieces, technically easy but musically deep and challenging, polytonal and polymetric arrangements of traditional peasant melodies (as Bartók called them). The music is profound,



Students got a chance to play with well-known violinists before an appreciative audience at Carnegie Hall's Fiddlefest. Isaac Stern, Midori, and Diane Monroe (second, fourth, and last from the left) performed Bach with young musicians from East Harlem.

meaningful, and joyous, and was played to a tee by Tree and Steinhardt.

Karen Briggs was up next, and her playing knocked my socks off. I had been hearing a lot of talk in recent weeks about this hot jazz violinist from L.A., but this was the first time I had heard her. She has a wonderfully natural style, a full, rich tone (probably the most satisfying tone of any player that evening), ideas culled from various gospel, jazz, and Latin influences, and a powerhouse sense of rhythm. Briggs performed variations on "Summertime" with pianist Dave Grusin and drew whoops and hollers from the audience with her lyrical, swinging playing.

I was already starting to feel proud to be among the ranks of jazz and folk players, when who should come on stage but Mark O'Connor. O'Connor's playing is always like money in the bank, but he outdid himself this night. Playing unaccompanied, he started out with some highly filigreed improvising, then moved into Jay Ungar's "Ashokan Farewell." (After all those years of playing that tune with Jay in lousy dives and basement coffeehouses as a member of the group Fiddle Fever, I'm happy to see it getting the popular success it deserves.) Finally he launched into variations on one of his original pieces. You could hear the sound of jaws hitting the floor as he played faster than we all thought was humanly possible. Not just fast, but impossibly fast, clean, precise, and articulate. O'Connor, coming originally from the Texas fiddle tradition, set the technical standard at a concert in Carnegie Hall with Perlman, Stern, and Midori. Pretty impressive. The kids joined Mark for a charming "Orange Blossom Special."

During the break, Steinhardt and Stern were talking with O'Connor. "Mark, that's probably the slowest Orange Blossom you've ever played in your life," laughed Steinhardt. O'Connor then gave Stern a copy of *Heroes*, his new CD, which features duets with great violin players from many traditions. There was a surrealistic moment as Stern scanned the liner notes. "Texas Shorty, Benny Thomasson, hmm," he said knowingly. Later in the evening I told O'Connor that never in a million years would I have expected to hear the names of those Texas fiddlers coming from the mouth of one of the world's most renowned violinists.

The second half began with Perlman, who was in a jovial mood. "I got inspired when I heard the kids play that Baroque stuff. I've got to play some sort of Baroque stuff. I'll play Variations on a Theme by Corelli, by the famous Baroque violinist Fritz Kreisler." Perlman played beautifully,

of course. His ravishing treatment of Elgar's *Salut d'amour* was the most gloriously lyrical playing heard all night.

Next up was Diane Monroe, who played some Stravinsky and, in an amazing display of gear shifting, her own arrangement of "Amazing Grace." Free, dark, brittle, and intimate, without sentimentality, she showed that it's possible to be fluent in a number of different violin languages.

John Blake, Jr., and Billy Taylor collaborated on a fresh reading of Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are." Blake, one of our jazz violin treasures, reharmonized the melody with some nifty double stops and sailed through the changes with his expressive style. The next morning over breakfast, Blake and I discussed his new jazz teaching method, *Jazz Improvisation Made Easy* (coauthored by Jody Harmon), and he told me that Perlman's son, Rami, had taken an improvisation class with him this past summer. That news made Blake's efforts on behalf of the kids at Carnegie seem all the more fitting.

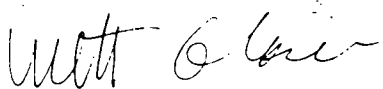
The penultimate performers were Ani and Ida Kavafian, accompanied by Jonathan Feldman. They played Sarasate's ridiculously difficult *Navarra* with devilish humor and élan. Their obvious joy at ripping off even the most impossible passages with ease and grace elicited whoops and laughter and premature applause at one point. For me, theirs was the greatest of the classical performances on the program.

Stern took the stage to make some concluding remarks. Referring to himself and the other "stars," he said, "We've all done our best, but in truth those kids are the stars. What a happy evening. There have been many in this hall, but very few have radiated this utter joy and camaraderie."

Finally, all the "stars" and 14 of the kids joined to play the first movement of the Bach Double-Violin Concerto. All barriers had been broken—musical style, age, fame, race, economic class. What was left was the transcendent joy of making music.

After it was all over, after more talk, dessert, and coffee, I walked back out onto 57th Street. At least for this evening, New York was enchanted. I floated down the street, happy to be alive, and grateful to be a musician.

All the best,



Matt Glaser

Metropolitan News

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Michelle V. Agins/The New York Times

Since the fiscal crisis of the 1970's, most public schools in New York City have not offered fine arts. Roberta Guaspari Tzavaras teaches violin at Central Park East II Elementary School in Manhattan. Students for the class are selected through a lottery.

Fiscal Cuts May Still Harlem Pupils' Violins

By EVELYN NIEVES

Roberta Guaspari Tzavaras's violin class at Central Park East I Elementary School in Manhattan would not be dismissed. Fifteen minutes after she had announced — with a quick, graceful bow of thanks — that the day was over and the school bus waiting, the 28 students continued to play around.

"I'll play 'Frère Jacques,'" said Soo-Jin Alexander, a 7-year-old second grader, as she positioned a bow almost as long as she is tall. When told she played well, she whispered: "I'm not really a beginner. I've practiced a lot."

At three of East Harlem's alternative elementary schools — River East and Central Park East I and II — Ms. Tzavaras's violin classes carry the cachet of a varsity letter. Such is the clamor to join the first-grade beginner's class, limited to 14 students in each school, that the students are picked by lottery.

A class that carries the cachet of a varsity letter faces extinction.

Ms. Tzavaras promises a place in the next year's intermediate class to students not chosen, provided they take outside lessons in the interim. Many do.

These children practice the violin because their older, cooler classmates do. They take it because the concerts Ms. Tzavaras conducts three times a year are standing room only. And they take it because their parents know they are lucky to have the choice; since the fiscal crisis of the mid-70's, about two-thirds of the public elementary schools in New York City have not offered

any fine arts at all.

Now most of the remaining programs are facing extinction in June as the Board of Education tries to stave off \$505 million in threatened budget cuts. School officials say they must cut to the bone. That is why the concert Ms. Tzavaras conducted last month with 141 students in the Central Park East I school auditorium was a benefit.

Trying to Raise Money

In some schools, nonprofit organizations have stepped in to fill the arts gap. But many more are in the same position as Ms. Tzavaras, who, in anticipation of the cuts, is trying to raise \$40,000 — her annual salary — plus the cost of medical benefits for herself and her two teen-age sons.

Last month's concert raised \$2,200, \$1,500 of it from two arts patrons with no connections to the school and the rest from parents

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At three of East Harlem's alternative elementary schools, Roberta Guaspari Tzavaras's violin classes left, and Jacob Blitz, students at Central Park East II, practiced for her class. The first-grade beginners' class, is limited to 14 students in each school.

Budget Cuts May Still Harlem Pupils' Violins

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and teachers. The 43-year-old Ms. Tzavaras — who herself learned to play the violin in public school in Rome, N.Y. — received bachelor's and master's degrees in music education at Boston University and moved to East Harlem where she began teaching in District 4's much-heralded magnet schools 11 years ago.

To Mrs. Tzavaras, the end of the violin program would mean becoming a private teacher, giving lessons many of her students could not afford. She does not want to do this.

Hanging on to Every Word

"I'm committed to teaching kids who would never have been able to pick up the violin," she said. "I'm the daughter of a factory worker, and I'd never have picked up the violin if it wasn't for public school. It was a gift I wanted to give back."

Her students are black, white, Hispanic, Asian. More than half come from Harlem and other poor neighborhoods in Manhattan; most of the rest come from better-off neighborhoods on

the Upper West Side. All of them hang on the teacher's every word. In class, their faces contort in concentration. Ms. Tzavaras, who comes to class in long dresses and combat boots and lets the students call her by her first name, is at once utterly approachable and revered.

The children clearly love their classes. They vie for a chance to celebrate the violin and the violin teacher.

"I love the violin," said Nora Friedman, an 12-year-old sixth grader at Central Park East I, at 1573 Madison Avenue at 106th Street. "When you get a piece of music right, it feels so good." She began taking Ms. Tzavaras's classes in the first grade and recently won first place in an orchestra competition that pitted her against students from public and private schools throughout the city, Long Island and Westchester County.

"Roberta is a great teacher," Anaar Stephens, a 9-year-old fifth grader, said. "She pushes us to get good results."

About two dozen of Ms. Tzavaras's 141 students belong to outside orchestras. The Interschool Orchestras of

New York, which includes five orchestras for students aged 6 through 18 from throughout the metropolitan region, has accepted about 20 children from Ms. Tzavaras's classes in the last five years.

Three years ago, the Interschool Orchestras' executive director, Ann McKinney, issued an open invitation to take any of Ms. Tzavaras's students — on scholarship.

"They're that good," Ms. McKinney said.

"A lot of the kids whom she works with our playing their instrument and not hanging out on street corners, doing drugs," she said. "They're also minority students becoming proficient at a time when most of the students who reach high school orchestras are white or Asian and from private schools."

The violin classes have sometimes been used as leverage for students with discipline problems.

"I've had students that have been told if they continue to misbehave, they won't be allowed to take violin anymore," she said. "They have straightened up. One became a model student, and a great violin player."