



# Getting A Life

by Jeannie Mellinger

*As Associate Principal Second Violin with the North Carolina Symphony, Jacqueline Saed Wolborsky sits in the front row of the orchestra near the conductor, her long curly hair sometimes down, sometimes pulled up or back, always wearing something fabulous, her expression intent and focused. Even in the sea of black that is an orchestra on concert nights, she has charisma that, despite her petite stature, makes her seem larger than life. In the 2009/10 season, fascinated Jackie-watching concertgoers noticed something new: she actually was growing larger with life at every performance. Jackie almost made it through the entire season before giving birth on June 4 to twins Chloe and Cameron, whose combined weight was a staggering twelve-and-a-half pounds. Jackie returned to the Symphony for the December 2010 Amadeus concerts, leaving us all to whisper the title of a certain movie: “I don’t know how she does it.”*

Jackie zips into a crowded Starbucks near her home, bag over her shoulder, tennis visor pulled low. “I’m hiding today,” she grins. As if. All the baristas know her and greet her with obvious, friendly affection, which she returns. She’s a star in latte land as well as the concert hall.

The twins, she reports, are doing great. At fifteen months they are active, energetic, developing distinct personalities and well past those early months that famously try the fiber of new parents in ways they never imagined possible.

“It was so hard in the beginning,” Jackie says. “In fact, the pregnancy itself was difficult. I was huge. My stomach was in the way of my bow arm when I was sitting. I was so uncomfortable playing I finally had to stop. I just could not sit and play for long stretches. Towards the end of the pregnancy, I really couldn’t even get around. My parents came to help out, and my father would take me for walks in a wheelchair because I was so anxious to get outside.”



*“Because I knew which baby was on which side when I was pregnant, it was obvious that Cameron responded most strongly to the piano and Chloe to the violin.”*

When the babies were born (by planned Caesarian section), Jackie and husband Brian felt incredible joy. “I couldn’t believe that we created these two amazing beings!” says Jackie. But that euphoria is just nature’s way of giving you something to cling to during the sleepless nights, the heartbreaking crying, the smelly diapers, the crusty laundry, the feedings and all that comes with those adorable little babies.

Now multiply by two. Two babies not sleeping through the night. Two overflowing pails of dirty diapers. Two feedings. Two sets of lungs to wail away. “They weren’t on the same schedule,” she says. “You know how they tell you to sleep when the baby does? Well, in my case, when one baby was sleeping, the other one wasn’t. And Cameron had a problem with acid reflux, which took a while to diagnose. So he was waking three or four times in the night, crying, which translated into very little sleep for me.”

Between summer break and maternity leave Jackie, still practicing (“to keep up my sanity!”), was away from the North Carolina Symphony for five-and-a-half months. “Coming back to ‘work’ was still taxing,” Jackie wrote in a blog last spring. “The hardest thing to get used to was working late. While on maternity leave, I would try to go to sleep soon after the twins would fall asleep, sometimes as early as nine p.m. Back at work, I had to quickly readjust. I now realize how hard it is to count measures of rest and stay

focused with little sleep. Never an issue before, I started second-guessing myself – ‘was that eight measures I just counted or eighteen?’”

But Chloe and Cameron have found their sleep-eat-play rhythm now and could not be sweeter. They communicate in that private language so many twins develop, playing jokes on each other, creating secret games and making each other laugh. Chloe, especially, seems to have a droll sense of humor. “She will pretend to feed us,” says Jackie, “and then at the last second, just as she’s about to put a morsel of food in our mouth, she yanks it away and, with a smirk, pops it in her own mouth.”

As for the violin with which they are growing up, both babies are mesmerized. “At first, they seemed scared of the sound,” says Jackie. “Then they were fascinated, amazed and awestruck. They love music and rhythm – they dance, they bang on things. Because I knew which baby was on which side when I was pregnant, it was obvious that Cameron responded most strongly to the piano and Chloe to the violin. I actually felt her stand right up in the womb when she heard Vivaldi. They still have these preferences! And so there absolutely will be piano and violin lessons when they get a little older.”

Jackie, too, has found her rhythm again. Between home and orchestra, she is training for a half-marathon and plays on a tennis team. The best advice Jackie has ever received, she says, was from one of her most influential violin teachers, Almita Vamos. Jackie credits Almita and her husband Roland for bringing her back to the violin after a long break. “Mrs. Vamos always told me, ‘Have a life.’ And that’s what I have tried to do. There has to be a balance.”

From music, Jackie has learned much. “People are people, the world over,” she says. “Whether in a developed country or not, people relate to each other in the same ways. They have the same basic needs, and they respond to music and rhythm in the same ways everywhere.”

From becoming a mother, Jackie has learned, perhaps, even more. “I feel that I know now what is important in life, what really matters. I don’t get caught up in things that are unimportant. I know I am stronger now, and everything is much clearer to me. I have more confidence. I believe that if I can raise twins, I can do anything. And I always have the music to come back to.

“The way I manage is with lots of planning ahead, thinking things out and being organized and very efficient. The balance to that, for me, is the violin, the performance. I can get lost in the music. It’s where I feel completely peaceful.”

It all adds up to a life. Thank you, Mrs. Vamos.

# LETTERS TO OUR FRIENDS



*Introducing a new feature!* In Letters to Our Friends, long-time former principal clarinet Jimmy Gilmore answers your questions and discusses your observations about the North Carolina Symphony. Readers of *Opus Magazine* have enjoyed Jimmy's feature articles for years. In this issue, he responds to a patron's observations about our education concerts during a tour of western North Carolina in spring 2010.

On the orchestra's tour of western North Carolina you observed that the kids were the most interested in seeing and hearing the instruments. I have had the same experience throughout my career. And why not? A symphony orchestra is a feast for the eye as well as the ear, and all those different instruments assembled on one stage are bound to be a source of wonder and amazement for a child.

Sometimes we try to explain things too much and give short shrift to those things that we experience through the senses. Actually seeing and hearing an instrument played will always trump an explanation of what it looks and sounds like. The French horn received a big reaction when the kids heard it played, but their imaginations really caught fire when they were told that the horn would be twenty-seven feet long if you uncoiled it! This combination of seeing, hearing and being told an amazing fact is a perfect balance to form a lasting memory for the child. Regardless, the principle seems to be: the larger the instrument, the greater the reaction. You noted that the audience was "thrilled by the tuba." This is universal, just as visitors to the zoo are more impressed with the elephant than the marmot.

Speaking of zoos, the children who attended the Instrument Zoo were given the unique opportunity to touch the instruments and try to produce a sound on them. Encountering the

instruments on this level is a great way to follow up a concert. How many times have we heard a child say he or she liked the flute the best, or the trumpet, or the violin? Actually trying a favorite instrument after hearing it played by a professional is a great help because the child already has a concept of what it should sound like and how it is played.

You were also interested in the audience's reaction to the music itself. The kids were uninhibited in their excitement as they bounced in their seats and swayed to the music, their body language showing an enthusiasm rare in an adult audience. Stravinsky once quipped that, "Music expresses nothing but itself." Doubtless this was said in reaction to the excesses of German Romanticism and the concept of programmatic music, but one wonders what Stravinsky would have thought had he been present for the education concerts you attended. What, except the music, could cause the audience to sway and pretend to click castanets in the "Spanish Dance," and hop to the music of *The Lone Ranger*? Who knows what accompanying extra-musical thoughts may have entered their minds? The kids' physical reaction was what naturally happens when we feel the music. It would take a very serious effort to stifle that natural urge.

The fascination for musical instruments and how they work is illustrative of another interesting point. All the kids you witnessed

who were playing some sort of "air instrument" are children of the high-tech, electronic age. Our education concerts bear witness to the fact that 17th-, 18th- and 19th-century technology, as embodied in the instruments of the orchestra, still has the power to sway. The violin has not changed form for centuries and represents a technology that some would say reached its zenith with Stradivari and Guarneri centuries ago. Ironically those iconic makers are the very ones that modern luthiers spend a lifetime trying to emulate. All the instruments in the modern orchestra were a part of the ensemble by the early years of the 19th century. Yes, improvements have been made to key systems on the woodwinds and the mechanics of the brasses have improved, but the instruments have retained their basic forms for at least two centuries.

When the students attend an education concert, they are given the opportunity to experience the visceral excitement of live performance. The material on the concert represents some of the finest music our culture has produced. That the North Carolina Symphony has availed four generations of citizens this opportunity is a remarkable legacy, unique among symphony orchestras.

— Jimmy Gilmore

*Have an idea or question you'd love for Jimmy to tackle?  
Please write to him at [jmellinger@ncsymphony.org](mailto:jmellinger@ncsymphony.org).*



# Two Lads from Chets

*On February 23-25, 2012, North Carolina Symphony Music Director Grant Llewellyn welcomes someone who is more than just a talented guest artist to the orchestra's concerts in Wilmington and Raleigh. Pianist Stephen Hough is an old friend. Together as young boys they attended the prestigious Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, England. Unfortunately a planned face-to-face chat about those early days, to be conducted in London by Grant's daughter Imogen, coincided with last summer's riots in the city, and the meeting was cancelled. Instead, the two classmates responded separately to the same questions via email, offering unique insight on their shared time at what has become the U.K.'s largest music school.*

**Opus:** *Tell us how you met at Chets. How old were you? What classes and activities did you share?*

**STEPHEN HOUGH:** I think I was ten and Grant was 11 when we met at Chetham's. We were in the same form, so we basically shared part of each day for five years, and several classes. History, English and French perhaps. I do remember Grant being extremely good at sports. I used to leave my sports kit at home so I wouldn't have to take part. I got a whack on the backside with a tennis shoe then I could go off and read or gossip.

**GRANT LLEWELLYN:** I think that Stephen joined Chets a year or two after me. We were in the same class, which comprised most of the specialist music students. The school had changed to specialize in music education in 1969, and the intake came increasingly from all over the U.K. Stephen was one of the "day boys," who came in from their homes in the Manchester area. We therefore didn't hang out together as much as I did with my fellow boarders, with whom I lived throughout the term.

I remember Stephen as a quietly smart, articulate lad who didn't need to be heard in class, but whom you knew was completely on top of every subject he chose. I was a bit of a jock, I suppose, and was as keen to kick and chase balls as I was to play my cello and piano. I had a wide acquaintance of mates, whereas I remember Stephen having a dedicated group of close friends. It was mainly in the musical arena that we spent time together.

**Opus:** *Were you a part of the infamous International Bollard Day? Any other shenanigans you remember getting up to?*

**GL:** The International Bollard Day was really the territory of the boarding boys, as we had to illegally hoard the [traffic cones] at night time so as not to be detected and arrested. The trick was to "borrow" a bollard or two from certain traffic or building sites around Manchester city center and stash them in a secure place in school until the eve of International Bollard Day. Then, overnight, we festooned the school with hundreds of mostly luminous orange bollards. As the school was housed in the original manor house at the epicenter of medieval Manchester, there were numerous spires, turrets and gargoyles to be decorated, plus the ultimate challenge, the top of the school flagpole. Of course this also left unmarked a number of gaping holes in the

roads of Manchester and so was not appreciated by the local police (with whom I may still have a record, somewhere).

**SH:** I remember assembling a pile of dirty bricks on the history teacher's desk for a sort of semi-joke, semi-artistic display. The teacher, Mr. Williams, was very good about this vandalism and every time I saw him in later years would mention it with a faint air of admiration. I hadn't the heart by that stage to tell him I'd done it to be naughty.

**Opus:** *You collaborated on a composition. Do you remember it?*

**GL:** A small group of us were selected to attend intensive music classes, one of which spawned a combination musical based on the tale of the Selfish Giant. I was very proud of a string quartet movement I wrote until the teacher declared it was "pure Shostakovich." I remember Wayne Marshall, Stephen Bott, Chris McCracken, Peter Wise and, of course, Stephen Hough all in the group. They were all better pianists than me, but I had a hand in the eventual quartet, plus I think I may have put it all together! Go figure.

**SH:** I remember Grant and I playing chamber music together, trio and cello sonatas, but not composition as such.

**GL:** Most importantly I remember performing with Stephen in recital. The Beethoven A-Major Cello Sonata was a favorite and was well-chosen, as it is more of a workout for the pianist than for the cellist. However, already Stephen was in a different league on the piano to my average cello skills, and I have memorable recollections of the first time I heard him as a concerto soloist with the Halle Orchestra whilst still at school. The finale of the Mendelssohn G-minor Concerto has never sounded more brilliant and sparkling



Grant Llewellyn



Stephen Hough

to me since that first live exposure in the hands of Stephen. That same effervescent quality was there in a performance of the Hummel Second Concerto we performed with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the London Festival Hall when we were still in our 20s.

**SH:** I think the first [performance after Chetham's] we did was Rachmaninoff, the First Concerto with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. After that we played Hummel's A-minor Concerto with the BBC Symphony, and other occasions over the years. It's always wonderful to work with Grant.

**GL:** My first taste of the Rachmaninoff First Concerto was with Stephen and the CBSO, and it might still be my favorite. Then most recently, [we were on] a wonderful tour with the Australian Chamber Orchestra playing Saint-Saëns and Weber.

*Opus: What is it like to perform with a conductor or performer you know so well versus someone you are meeting for the first time?*

**SH:** It's always an anxious moment for me when I start rehearsing with a new conductor. It's a bit like a date. You just don't know what will happen.

**GL:** Obviously you can relax with someone you know and feel comfortable with. You also can explore and challenge each other in ways that are impossible in the time allocated to the average concerto appearance. I increasingly try to work with people I know well and respect. Stephen is foremost amongst them.

*Opus: Tell us particularly about your upcoming concert in North Carolina and the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2.*

**SH:** It's *the* great Romantic piano concerto really, a piece that is both full of glorious tunes but which is also skillfully constructed. It is passionate but also noble. Rachmaninoff was an aristocratic man whose face was completely expressionless when he played. Everything was in the notes.

**GL:** I think that Stephen and Rachmaninoff are a perfect match. Firstly for sheer pianism there is nobody around to touch Stephen, and the same went for Rachmaninoff in his day. But Stephen makes so much more of these concertos than the war horses they can become. He has a fantastic touch and delicacy, again reminding me of Rachmaninoff's own recordings, and a true understanding and appreciation of what the orchestra is contributing. He will challenge us, but it will always be in a collegial way. I can't wait.





## THE CIMBALOM

If you were proposing to perform a concert of Gypsy melodies, it would strengthen your case if you had a cimbalom. The earliest form of this haunting instrument was an Arabian version called the kanun, a musical sound box with strings strung across one or two bridges and struck with a pair of metal mallets. Early Asiatic nomads from Mongolia and China as well as roaming Gypsies from India spread it to all parts of Europe and the Middle East, like so much wheat. It evolved into many different shapes and sizes, variously called, in Germany, the hackbrett; in Italy, the psalterio; in England, the dulcimer; in Austria, the zither; and in Hungary and Romania, the cimbalom. Admittedly, the modern version of the instrument has strayed somewhat from its mobile roots. Developed by József V. Schunda in the late 19th century, with a pedal to make softer playing possible, it can weigh up to 200 pounds!

— Jeannie Mellinger

In the Symphony's January "Passport to Hungary" concerts, Petra Berényi will show us how it's done in Kamilló Lendvay's Concertino Semplice for Cimbalom and Orchestra. Here's what Petra told us about her instrument:

### What are the challenges of the cimbalom?

**PETRA BERÉNYI:** Mostly tuning and transporting! Since the strings are divided by one or two bridges, upper strings offer three different pitches. While you tune the middle pitch, the two sides should be in tune. Most of the time they are not. Then you get your copper screwdriver-like tool and a hammer to adjust the little brass pieces on the side. How fun! Takes forever...

### When did you learn to play the cimbalom?

**PB:** I began at the age of six. In Budapest, several music schools teach this wonderful instrument. My ear-training teacher thought that since I am left-handed, I wouldn't be able to play a stringed instrument. (She was wrong; I became a violist as well.) I agreed to learn the cimbalom because every music school had at least two of them, and I thought I wouldn't have to carry it to the school

and home. Nobody warned me that, as a professional, I would have to carry it everywhere.

### What do you love about it?

**PB:** I love that basically anything can be played on it! You can play almost the whole repertoire, from Baroque to Modern, including Bach's organ pieces, the Goldberg Variations, French and English suites, solo violin and cello works. I have also done Couperin, Rameau, Domenico Scarlatti, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Janacek, Paganini and many others. We cimbalom players usually make our own transcriptions, but there are many original works written for the ancient type of cimbalom. Leopold Mozart knew it, mostly as a folk instrument, and wrote a part for it in "Die Bauernhochzeit" Symphony.

We use many different kinds of mallets, which open a wide horizon of changing colors, something other instruments like piano cannot do easily. It really gives composers new possibilities if they let their imagination fly. We all keep searching for new sounds; on the cimbalom, through the use of new techniques.