



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.”



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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.