

## SOLZHENITSYN TO PLAY AMNESTY BENEFIT

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Every season a distinguished musician plays a benefit in the Boston area for Amnesty International. The choice for this year's 22d event is a pianist almost predestined to play a concert for this cause: Ignat Solzhenitsyn, son of the Nobel Prize-winning dissident Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Musical talent appears where it chooses to, and it can catch even the most alert parents unaware. Ignat Solzhenitsyn was born in Moscow in 1972 and was only 4 when his family moved into its 18 years of exile, in Cavendish, Vt. There he grew up in one of the most famous, yet intensely private, households in the world. By the time he was 6, young Solzhenitsyn began to teach himself to play the piano - the previous owners had left an old instrument behind in the house.

"A friend of the family did not play the piano but did know how to read music, and he taught me the acronyms everyone learns - FACE and Every Good Boy Does Fine. I used the music books and the music we had in the house and taught myself how to play Tchaikovsky's Waltz in E-flat. That was my big showpiece," Solzhenitsyn recalled last week from Australia, where he had just finished a concert tour.

It took the senior Solzhenitsyn's great friend and champion, the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, to tell him that something unusual was developing in the household.

"My parents are great lovers of music, and when my brothers and I were growing up, there was always music on the radio or the phonograph. I remember the first time I came into contact with a Beethoven symphony. I walked into my father's office and heard something so spellbinding that I couldn't stop listening to it - I had to ask my father what it was. But my parents simply didn't know anything about musical training, didn't realize that I ought to be taking lessons."

Rostropovich said he would take care of everything, though that was impossible because of his own busy schedule. What he did was to call up the most famous musician resident in Vermont, the great pianist Rudolf Serkin. Rostropovich told him, "I have found this talented young boy, but I haven't got a clue about who should teach him here in Vermont. Would you listen to him?"

Serkin agreed to do so, as Solzhenitsyn, aged 8 1/2, played his Tchaikovsky waltz and Bach minuet. Serkin's suggestion was that Solzhenitsyn should begin with Luis Battle, a distinguished pianist and teacher who had never taught a child before. Battle sent him to Chonghyo Shin, who taught him for the next three years.

"It was my grandmother who drove me to my lessons, 72 miles each way, twice a week - and you know what the weather is like in the winter in that part of Vermont. My parents supported my interest in music, but they could not have handled the transportation. And I could not have learned music without my grandmother, which is why she was one of the most important people in my life."

In three years with Shin, Solzhenitsyn made rapid progress. He then returned to Battle for three years of more advanced study. Meanwhile he attended public schools in Vermont, which is where he learned his fluent, colloquial English.

At home, the language was Russian, and tuition in subjects ranging from algebra and physics through Russian history to tennis came from the head of the household. From that training came the younger Solzhenitsyn's

dedication to serious artistic goals and to the work ethic that makes it possible to attain them.

At 14, Solzhenitsyn left the Green Mountain High School in Chester to go to London to work with Maria Curcio, the Italian pianist who had been a favorite pupil of Artur Schnabel's.

"Those three years in London were fantastic years for my development, and it was my great good fortune to have found a teacher of that quality.

I started out living with a family, but before long I was living on my own. I have an independent, private nature, and I wanted to be able to practice whenever I wanted to."

Solzhenitsyn recalls childhood trips to Boston, to hear concerts in Symphony Hall, with particular pleasure. "I heard one of Vladimir Horowitz's last concerts, and Mr. Serkin, Claudio Arrau, and Murray Perahia. And quite a few pianists came to Brattleboro to play - I heard Ivan Moravec there, and also Myscyszlaw Horszowski. And I heard Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony, both in Symphony Hall and at Tanglewood."

Solzhenitsyn regrets that he never heard many of the great Russian pianists of earlier generations. "I had a ticket to hear Emil Gilels in Carnegie Hall in 1985, but he died before the concert took place. Sviatoslav Richter I did hear; that was unforgettable, and I had the great privilege of knowing him a little bit."

When Solzhenitsyn returned to America, he enrolled in the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied piano with Gary Graffman and began to spin out the second strand of his career as a conductor. "In New York, I started to work with Claudio Arrau, but that lasted only a short time, because he died. That was when I went to Curtis, where I got interested in conducting, and studied with Otto Werner Mueller."

Today Solzhenitsyn is principal conductor of the Concerto Soloists Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia and regularly appears as guest conductor with regional American orchestra. "I try to divide my time about equally between conducting and playing the piano, but I probably spend more time at the piano. I want to keep working in both directions; this mixture is the most exciting, the most fulfilling for me."

Solzhenitsyn's career began without the help of competitions. "I did go to Geneva, in 1990, and made it into the semifinals. It was an interesting experience in terms of my own preparation. But I didn't need competitions because of the care my parents and teachers took of me. I am always stumped by questions about my debut, because I began to perform very shortly after I began to study properly. When I was 10 I played my first recital, and later that year played Beethoven's Second Concerto with orchestra. At the beginning I played four or five concerts a year, then 10 or a dozen; it was all very gradual."

And so far, Solzhenitsyn's career has developed without the help of recordings. "I have made some recordings and put them away to be released eventually. The priorities of the recording companies are different from what mine are. They want records produced at a certain speed, and they want a big say in the choice of repertoire. To me that is anathema - I am the only one who can decide what is appropriate for me. The industry is going through incredible changes, and while that is happening, I'd rather wait. I'm in no rush."

The lanky blond pianist has played in Boston only once, in a Jordan Hall celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Brandeis University a couple of years ago. He played the Shostakovich Piano Quintet with the Lydian Quartet and the Bartok Sonata, which is one of the works on his program tomorrow night. He has also played a Mozart concerto with the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood.

He regularly plays throughout America and Europe, and now is a regular visitor to Russia. "Before 1993, playing in Russia was impossible to contemplate, but since then, I've been there a lot, playing not only in Moscow and St. Petersburg but also in Novosibirsk and all over the place - and Russia is a very big place."

The Solzhenitsyn family still owns the home in Vermont, to which the pianist and his brothers remain sentimentally attached. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, of course, returned to Russia, where he remains vigorously active in his early 80s - and maintains a lively interest in his son's career. "He is a very proud father," his son says.

Ignat Solzhenitsyn lives in Philadelphia with his wife, Carolyn. "She is an American, who speaks Russian, and a physician. We have our first baby on the way - within just a few weeks now. I feel I can call Carolyn the finest young lady in the world."

SIDEBAR:

Green Mountain man

When talking to Ignat Solzhenitsyn, it's impossible not to ask him about his memories of growing up in Cavendish, Vt.

"It was happenstance that we moved to Vermont. What my parents were looking for was, in no particular order, a home in America, near the kind of research facilities my father needed for his work, and some semblance of the weather they were used to. They also wanted a quiet, isolated, and secure property for the children to grow up in. This property happened to come up for sale - the owner had died - and finding it was a real blessing for all of us. It could not have worked out any better. From the point of view of my father's work, this was the most most productive and happy period of his life.

"And it was wonderful for us as children. Maria Curcio had been a child prodigy and she knew how damaging it was for a musical person not to be allowed to be a child - to do the normal things in life, to play sports, to find the first boyfriend or girlfriend. All that is immensely important for personal and artistic development.

"From the time I was about 5, my father would read to us - some of his favorite works, but also his own books. He said to my mother that he knew we wouldn't understand or appreciate every aspect of his work, but he thought it was important to expose us to it anyway. One of the first things I remember was his reading his short story 'Matryona's Home' to us - it is an absolute masterpiece, and I think that is where I would tell an American reader to begin. I have read all of his books, and since my childhood they have been extremely important to me.