

Pianist keeps in touch with the real world

By Julia Shiller
special writer

At 10 a.m., as the traffic of New York City roars in the background, former Detroit Ruth Laredo is in her apartment and already absorbed in serious practicing on her nine-foot Steinway grand piano.

With the telephone disconnected until her 16-year-old daughter Jennifer comes home from college, Laredo hopes to get four to five hours of practicing in for her upcoming concert.

After that, she will put on her Walkman and Nike shoes and jog her usual three miles in Riverside park to the sounds of Genesis, Sting, and other rock groups. Laredo, like many performers of her class, professes a need to balance her career, that of concert pianist, with the more important factor of being in touch with the world around her.

"I'm a current events person," she said. "I read The New York Times all the time, and I love all kinds of music. Jennifer and I have enjoyed a great many concerts, art exhibits and plays. We listen to rock and roll together, and we discuss the latest in music and politics. We have always been very close."

Laredo is thankful to have a wonderful relationship with her daughter. It is this relationship, she maintains, that has endured the ups and downs that a concert career can bring a family.

Divorced in 1974 from violinist Jaime Laredo, with whom she had regularly played in recitals, she decided to pursue her own career in music while raising her daughter as a single parent.

"At the beginning, it wasn't easy. I tried to keep my concerts within the U.S. and Canada so that I could give a concert and come right home. I always had to find someone who was trustworthy to take care of Jennifer while I was away. I used to have music students in their 20s watch Jennifer. She would get attached to them right away."

LAREDO'S SKILLFUL BALANCING of priorities generated recording contracts that allowed her to be close to home. Now, after 21 LPs, among them the complete solo piano works of Rachmaninoff for CBS Records, and the complete sonatas of Scriabin for Nonesuch, she doesn't regret her decision. She has received outstanding reviews for her recordings as well as three Grammy nominations. And to date, she is a leading box office draw.

Metropolitan Detroiters will have a chance to hear Ruth Laredo in recital at Pro Musica on April 15, at 8:30 p.m., Friday, at Detroit Institute of Arts.

One person most likely to attend the concert is Mischa Kottler, Laredo's good friend and former piano teacher.



Ruth Laredo

"Whenever she's in Detroit, I always go to hear her play," said Kottler. "I'm very proud of her. She's really made a name for herself."

Kottler recalls times during Laredo's lessons when he would play passages for the young pianist to imitate, and she would promptly push him off the bench to demonstrate her ability in playing the passages just as well, if not better than her teacher.

"She was always hard working and ambitious," he said. "Sometimes she would insist on her own renditions, and I would have to accept." She has always been industrious.

Born in Detroit, she was already a pianist at age two, progressing quickly under her mother Miriam

Meckler's guidance.

"I always knew that I wanted to be a pianist. My mother was very supportive of that. She was a wonderful piano teacher and great with young people. She never pushed me to practice."

At age 10, Laredo went to study with Edward Bredshall, a "one-man cultural zone," and to debut with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

"My lessons with Bredshall were a lot of fun. He gave me inspiration. We listened to operas, and talked about art."

When Bredshall moved to California, Laredo went on to study with Kottler, an "institution in Detroit," who prepared her for the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. At Curtis, where she studied with Rudolf Serkin, Laredo learned how to project and enlarge her sound. She also learned how to interact with other musicians in chamber music, an activity she now frequently enjoys with flutist Paula Robinson, and ensembles such as the Tokyo and Cleveland quartets.

After her graduation in 1960, Laredo said, her first real break didn't come until the early 1970s.

"I was very anxious," she said. "After having played a number of concerts, I felt it was necessary to record some Scriabin. Since there was no comprehensive recording of Scriabin at the time, I searched for a

record company that would be interested.

"I finally found Alan Silver at Connoisseur Records who said, 'We'll give it a try.' I remember that I was pregnant back then. I started making recordings when Jennifer was a month old. I made all 10 in the first year of her life. It was wonderful. I was at home practicing and with my baby."

Laredo's success with the Scriabin project created many new offers. In 1973, Columbia Masterworks invited her to commemorate Rachmaninoff's 100th birthday with recordings of the entire Rachmaninoff solo piano works.

"The challenge was enormous," she said. "It was awesome to face so much music and to learn the many, many notes. The stretches are incredible. It was the hardest thing I ever did."

FOLLOWING THE COMPLETION of the Rachmaninoff recording project came recitals at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress and the White House, and performances with orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra.

When asked what she does to relax before a concert, she said, "The very idea of going out to give a performance is most rewarding. To me, there's no better way to relax than to know that I'm going to be playing for people. I love the contact with the audience. I love the feedback."

She says that there are certain unpredictable things that she dislikes about performing — wind blowing, bad pianos, unexpected noises, but they are insignificant compared to her love of music. She clearly enjoys recording albums. Her recent projects include discs with Robinson and she has many more in mind. She is cautious, though, about divulging future recording projects. "I guess I've always been superstitious about that sort of thing," she said.

She is enthusiastic about editing a new Rachmaninoff Urtext edition for C.F. Peters Corporation. "The Prelude, Opus 3, No. 2 and the 10 Prel-

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— Ruth Laredo

udes, Opus 23 are already completed." When the second volume comes out, we'll see what it looks like. If it looks good, we'll do some more."

Once nominated by Ladies Home Journal as "Woman of the Year," Laredo's talents have led to her involvement in related areas. Her column for Keyboard Classics magazine, where she comments on pianistic problems, has earned her the recognition of a musical "Dr. Ruth." She has become a frequent guest on NBC's "Today" and other television shows, and the Bravo TV cable network dedicated an entire program to her.

She acknowledges her status as one of America's foremost pianists, but she says that success hasn't changed her values. She believes in the "pure and noble" things in life such as reading, attending plays and concerts, and in general, living life to the fullest.

IT TROUBLES HER that today's kids are so involved in television and videos and not enough in the study of traditional arts. She feels that parents must set examples early in order to cultivate their children's minds.

"From my own experience, when my daughter was growing up, I used to take her to museums, operas, concerts, but not just classical concerts. She was given a chance to try different kinds of music like rock, jazz and blues. She grew to love many different things, and there's a reason for that — she was guided in the things that she loved."

Laredo looks forward to learning more about her world and giving more concerts. For now though, her daughter has come home for the weekend, and she intends to make the most of her visit.

Flutist, pianist to perform



Nikolai Lemberg

The Music Study Club of Metropolitan Detroit will host a program with flutist Nikolai Lemberg and pianist Vladislav Kovalsky, at the Tuesday, April 19, general meeting.

The program will begin at 1 p.m., after a 12:15 p.m. dessert. It is open to the public for a \$3 donation, Birmingham Temple, 28811 W. 12 Mile, Farmington Hills.

Lemberg will perform works for solo flute by Honneger and Debussy and will be accompanied by Koval-

sky in works by Handel, Faure and Duvernoy, Kovalsky will perform two preludes for solo piano by Debussy.

Lemberg has taught flute and performed as a soloist and a chamber musician in the metropolitan area since his arrival here in 1983. An honors graduate of the Moscow State conservatory, he has been a first prize winner in international competitions and was principal flutist with major Moscow ensembles previous to his emigration from the Soviet Union.

Kovalsky, a graduate of the Leningrad State Conservatory and a first prize winner in the National Russian Competition, now teaches at Wayne State University and regularly as a soloist and in chamber music recitals.

For information on the April 19 program or about Music Study Club of Metropolitan Detroit, call Joan Rose, 543-5912.

Barbie dolls on parade

The Great Lakes Chapter of Barbie Doll Collectors Club will hold a doll show and sale 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, April 24 at Holiday Inn of Bloomfield, 1801 Telegraph, Bloomfield Hills. Proceeds will go to the Make a Wish Foundation.

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