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Safe and Smart

Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids

NOA MEYER

Jen,

I thought you
might like this
info for your files.

—
-Noa



MUSIC CENTER, INC.

THE EAST HARLEM PUBLIC SCHOOL
VIOLIN PROGRAM

4/21/98

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Artistic Director

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

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

Board of Directors

January 20, 1998

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Secretary

Ms. Noa Meyer
Office of the First Lady
Old Executive Office Building
Room 100
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Noa:

Danixa Berte-Toomer
Carmen Cabello
Barry Crumbley
Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras
Erlin Ibreck
Lucy Matos
Diane Monroe
Gary Stephens
Dorit Straus
Dorothea von Haeften
Ellen Weiss

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.

Board of Advisors

Jon Diamond
Chairperson
Edward Eichler
Richard Gelman
Susan Kaplan
Nan Newton
Bob Oxnam
Victor Palmieri
Harvey Schulman

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

Artistic Director

Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras

Executive Director

Eric M. Gribin

EMG/ab

cc: Susan Kaplan



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.



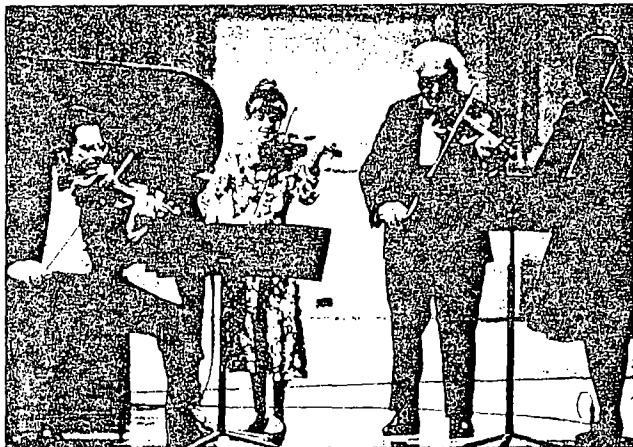
▲ "I train the students like you would an athlete," says Roberta Guaspari-Tzavaras (at New York City's River East Elementary School).

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