

# MAESTRO Itzhak Perlman & his wife, Toby

Three years ago, a mutual friend of the Perlman's and a childhood pal of Itzhak's asked me, "How would you like to hear Itzhak Perlman Music Program's students play at a private concert in Palm Beach? The party would be hosted by the founder of Netscape, Jim Clark. The Maestro and his wife, Toby, will be there."

Having admired Itzhak Perlman's music, I jumped at the opportunity. Perched high above the sea, Clark's residence assured a perfect setting. The dinner was superb, the wines were rare and the conversations enlightening. The joy that resulted from hearing students performing a complex, P. Tchaikovsky, String Sextet in D Minor, OP.70, was spellbinding and brought me to tears. Some of the students as young as 16 achieved a level of maturity and technical perfection worthy of the Maestro himself.

What really clinched my commitment was last summer's visit to Shelter Island, the home of The Perlman Music Program and the extraordinary new Kristy and James H. Clark Arts Center. Well into the 22nd century, acoustically speaking, but disguised as a modest housing complex, this 24-bed facility is lovingly called 'The Ritz.' Only minutes away from the Hamptons, Clark Arts Center provides an oasis of tranquility. But PMP is nothing less than the most rigorous regiment in a quest for musical perfection in the world. It has been thriving under the watchful eye and a 'tough-love' approach of the PMP founder and the wife of Maestro Itzhak Perlman, Toby, since its inception in 1993.

## FIRST, A CHAT WITH TOBY:

**Q: When did the idea of The Perlman Music Program come about?**

**A:** The idea had been percolating for years beginning in the Juilliard cafeteria during my student days. One day, over lunch, I designed what would later become the core curriculum for PMP. Later, as a parent, I searched for the perfect summer music camp for our own children. There are many fine programs out there, but my visits to a variety of summer programs always caused the same reaction, "If I were running this program..." In addition, I was also influenced by my personal experience. A poor student, I struggled to keep up and often wished for/craved a kinder environment.

**Q: Why Shelter Island?**

**A:** Shelter Island seemed like the perfect spot for us, and time has proven that we made the right choice. We got help from Steven Spielberg, David Geffen, Ronald and JoCarole Lauder, and Alberto Vilar who enabled us to move forward and create our very own PMP campus.

**Q: What makes PMP different from other musical programs?**

**A:** There are many fine, excellent summer music programs in the United States. PMP is different, in part, because of its size. We accept a maximum of 40 students in our 7-week pre-college Littles



*"The Perlman Music Program has been the most significant thing we have ever supported in the arts. Unquestionable excellence, dedication, passion, and the results are the hallmarks of the program." – Kristy and James H. Clark, the founder of Netscape.*

program and because students have the right of return through their 18th summer, we have very few openings each year.

**Q: What are the most important criteria of acceptance?**

**A:** Criteria for acceptance include level of accomplishment and what each faculty member listening to the DVD (submitted by each applicant) might intuit in terms of potential. The level is high, probably the highest of any pre-college music program out there. The teacher of each instrument decides on his/her own class; the viola teacher chooses the violists, the cello teacher, the cellists, and so on.

**Q: How did you get Jim and Kristy Clark involved?**

**A:** We met Jim Clark at a dinner party. He and Itzhak hit it off and the rest is history. Really, it was just one of those magical fortuitous moments.

## NOW, A WORD WITH ITZHAK:

**Q: Who were your teachers and was there a specific one who was a mentor?**

**A:** I studied the violin with 3 violin teachers; Rivka Goldgart in Israel and then, beginning at age 13, with Ivan Galamian and Dorothy DeLay simultaneously at The Juilliard School. They had different approaches and the combination was very successful for me. Certainly violinistically, they were the biggest influences in my life, but there were other important influences as well. The violinists of the time, Heifetz, Oistrakh, Milstein and Stern, all impacted upon



*"I wish I'd been able to go to a program like that. I studied classical piano for 12 years, but I didn't practice enough. I was supposed to be learning Mozart, but instead I'd write my own stuff." – Billy Joel*

me. I was lucky enough to know them and hear them live in concert. I heard and played with Leonard Bernstein, heard Pavarotti in his prime, and the great lieder singer Dietrich Fischer Dieskau. In addition, I became friends with the great musicians of my generation: Ashkenazy, Barenboim, Jacqueline DuPre. I went to school (Juilliard) with James Levine and, of course, my dear friend and colleague Pinchas Zukerman.

**Q: What is the value of music and what does it tell you about a person, culture and civilization?**

**A:** Life is hard. Art in general and specifically music, if it is great, lifts us out of our normal sphere of consciousness on to another plane, in to another world. It moves us, carries us away: a good thing.

**Q: Does it help to be a polymath [multitalented] to play violin?**

**A:** No, I do not think so. It helps if you want to be a musician and a knowledgeable person, of course, that's wonderful. But if your question is just about playing the instrument, the answer is no, it does not help to be a polymath.

**Q: How big were the hands of Niccolò Paganini – the most celebrated Italian virtuoso of the 1800s?**

**A:** I have absolutely no idea, but I would hazard a guess that they were on the large side because of his compositions, which are full of intervals that ask for big left hand stretches.

**Q: Is chamber music superior to symphonic? Is voice the best conveyor of truth in music?**

**A:** Chamber music is the highest form of music for me personally. Some of our greatest works are in the string quartet literature. Late Beethoven never disappoints. In the end, I suppose everything is an imitation of the voice. When I want to convey a musical idea to my



*"The Perlman Music Program is one of the East End's most treasured cultural institutions. I have tremendous faith that it will only grow to even greater heights." – Alec Baldwin*



*"It was a great honor to be a part of securing a permanent home for The Perlman Music Program. Today, the Shelter Island campus serves as the heart and soul of the Perlman community, providing its students, alumni and faculty a place of inspiration and respite." – Steven Spielberg*

students, I always use the word "sing" because it is the default, the natural way to approach the music - sing the song.

**Q: How does it make you feel to change a student's life?**

**A:** It gives me great joy to watch and hear progress as the student develops. PMP is the most amazing place. I love it. Everything about it is exciting on so many levels. I feel I grow because I am working with young talented students, eager to learn and always challenging me.



**Ava Roosevelt**

**Editor's Note:** Ava Roosevelt is the author of *The Racing Heart*. She is also a Palm Beach philanthropist and wife of the late William Donner Roosevelt, grandson of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. South Florida Opulence is pleased to have Ava as our newest columnist. Look forward to her inspiring Q&A interviews in each issue!