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West

NATICK

Allegro Music School puts 'seed of music' in students' lives

Allegro marks 10th with reunion concert

By Lenny Megliola | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 31, 2012



MICHELE MCDONALD FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Allegro student Brandon Ho performed a piece by Charles Dancla.

Doina Simovici's love of music needed a home. The native of Romania had a growing

after-school music program in the Natick area, but to reach the dream, she needed her own teaching space.

In 2002, she got a call from the Rev. Kathleen Reed, then pastor of Natick's Christ Lutheran Church. "She said, 'We'd love to have you here.' I couldn't believe it," Simovici recalled. When she checked out the church, there were just three old pianos. Still, she was grateful.

It was the humble beginning of Allegro Music School, now celebrating its 10th anniversary. Today the school averages 130 students a year, ranging in age from 5 to 75. That's not hyperbole. "I mean it," said Simovici.

She now works with eight finely tuned pianos at Riverbend School in Natick and the Lesley Ellis School in Arlington, as well as her home base at Christ Lutheran. Private lessons are given for piano, cello, guitar, violin, and harp, as well as voice. There are 17 instructors. "Very professional ones," said Simovici, who lives in Brookline.

Allegro isn't about playing Carnegie Hall. "Our mission is to put the seed of music in their life," she said.

Teresa MacRae of Sherborn sent three daughters to Allegro: Rebecca, now 21, and a brain and cognitive science major as a sophomore at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, plays the piano; Kendall, 19, took up the violin and attends Dartmouth College; Lilybet, 17, a student at Phillips Academy, plays the piano.



MICHELE MCDONALD FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Sisters Rachel and Megan Chau took center stage for a rendition of "Three German Dances" by Beethoven.

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"They have an interest, a purity, an honesty. It's a great gift that I try to preserve."



“It’s been wonderful,” said MacRae. “It’s all about the process. Rebecca can play piano for her sorority sisters.”

MICHELE MCDONALD FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE
A cake featuring a chocolate piano.

Laura Stettner of Southborough started playing the piano at 8 years old, but stopped at 16. She retired from her career in education in 2001 after teaching first grade in Weston. That’s when she found Allegro, and returned to the piano.

“I’m one of the senior students, let’s leave it at that,” said Stettner. “I do it for pleasure, for intellectual stimulation.”

Stettner admires Simovici’s “ability to get children to love music. She inspires students.”

Her students arrive early and late in life, but Simovici maintains “when they’re 6, they’re ready for private lessons.”

Joe Barnard of Natick is a student at Berklee College of Music. “We’re so grateful for the wonderful teachers both our children had through Allegro,” Barnard’s parents, Paul and Linda, wrote to Simovici.

Michele Sweeney of Natick enrolled two daughters at Allegro and said, “Their teacher has done a wonderful job in developing their singing talent, giving them the confidence to sing in public,” which has included performing the national anthem before a Worcester Sharks hockey game, and performing at open mic nights and in school musicals.

Katherine Van Amsterdam of Natick started her three daughters at Allegro when they were 5. They’re now 21, 16, and 14. She said Simovici taught them “discipline and humility and showed them kindness. She understands the world of a child.”



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Juliana van Amsterdam sang Schubert’s “An Die Musik”; O

Simovici gets emotional when she works with very young pianists. “They have an interest, a purity, an honesty. It’s a great gift that I try to preserve. Kids who finished here five, 10 years ago still call me up.”

Semesters last 15 weeks at Allegro. Enrollment costs vary.

“We have a scholarship fund for students who can’t pay,” said Simovici. “We had a mother with cancer who was unemployed. Her husband was in prison. She had a son, 11 or 12. She wrote me a letter.” The boy takes piano lessons. “He loves it.”

Allegro takes to the road to perform in the community, including at nursing homes, the Dover Town Library, and the Barnes & Noble store in Framingham.

“It’s a labor of love,” said Simovici.

She and her husband, Dan, a computer science professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston, left Romania to escape Communism. They have a 38-year-old son, Alexander, a computer engineer in Australia, who wasn’t smitten with music. “I feel guilty,” said Simovici.

She’s a one-woman dynamo, involved in every Allegro matter, business and pleasure. “These kids make me so happy,” she said.

Recently, past and present students performed as Allegro held its 10th anniversary celebration at the Center for Arts in Natick.

The first one to take the stage was guitarist Guy



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Harp students (from left) Eloise Baker, Matti Horne, Janine Owen playing a Welsh lullaby with teacher Mary- Jane Rupert.



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Teacher Tim Roberts and student

Mendilow, who had to race to another gig in Arlington as soon as he was finished.

**Johann Mari collaborating on “Allegro”
by S. Suzuki.**

In that case, he was asked, why risk coming to Natick at all?

“Because you don’t say no to Doina,” he said, smiling.

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