

Family Fugue

By Wanda Haskel
Photos by Kanji Takeno




The Borowsky family delights classical music audiences from Baltimore to Beijing

Parents Charles Borowsky and Cecylia Barczyk-Borowsky (third from left) created a rare home environment in which their children Elizabeth (seated), Emmanuel and Frances-Grace have flourished as classical musicians.

Most musicians only dream of performing at New York's legendary Carnegie Hall, but that dream came true for three young siblings from Baltimore in 2004. Elizabeth Borowsky '05, the pianist, was 20. Her brother Emmanuel, the violinist, was 17, and her sister Frances-Grace, the cellist, a mere 12. Together they astounded listeners in the Big Apple with their New York debut recital on the Carnegie Hall stage and accepted the Erick Friedman Prize for Outstanding Young Musicians.

After the concert, audience members quizzed the pianist on where she studied, assuming she was at Juilliard or Peabody. No, Elizabeth informed them, "I'm at Towson University. It has a wonderful music program."

Her musical training and that of her brother and sister not only had them performing in Carnegie Hall but also in spectacular venues in Asia, Europe and the Middle East. They even played in China as part of the pre-Olympic ceremonies.



The Borowsky siblings, Elizabeth, a pianist, Emmanuel, a violinist, and (standing) Frances-Grace, a cellist, performed at pre-Olympic ceremonies in Beijing.

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Pitch Perfect

Dubbed the American Virtuosi along with their parents, cellist Cecylia Barczyk-Borowsky and Charles Borowsky, Ph.D., who occasionally joins in on harmonica, these wunderkinder have taken the classical music world by storm. Both individually and as an ensemble, they have garnered international recognition, performing together and as soloists with some of the best orchestras in the world. Among them, they have recorded 13 CDs, studied with renowned musicians and won highly coveted prizes and honors.

The family matriarch, Cecylia Barczyk-Borowsky, known as the “first lady of cello,” was classically trained in her native Poland, then Moscow and the United States. A professor at Towson University since 1983, she also gives concerts, recitals and master classes throughout the world and appears as a soloist with prominent orchestras, including those of Berlin, London, Moscow, New York, Prague, Rio de Janeiro, Seoul and Tel Aviv. In her spare time, she records CDs, is artistic director for the International Music Institute and Festival USA and organizes Towson’s International Cello Festival.

Her three children, who have followed in her performing footsteps, each began their musical training at age 4.

Elizabeth, now 24, studied with pianist Reynaldo Reyes at TU, graduating *summa cum laude* in 2005 with a bachelor’s in music/piano performance. Also a composer, her “Let Us Go to Jerusalem, the City of Peace,” was premiered in 2003 by the King David String Ensemble of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. She recently completed a master’s degree at Indiana University’s renowned Jacobs School of Music.

At age 9, violinist Emmanuel performed Vivaldi’s A-minor concerto to a sold-out audience at Washington, D.C.’s National Shrine and received the Antonio Vivaldi Medal. At 15, he was selected for NPR’s internationally syndicated radio show “From the Top,” which features some of the world’s most promising young musicians. After several years studying under such eminent violinists as Erick Friedman (Yale), Dorothy Delay (Juilliard), Victor Danchenko (Peabody), and TU’s Zoltan Szabo, Emmanuel followed his sister to the Jacobs School for undergraduate studies.

The youngest, Frances-Grace, whose cello teacher is her mother, aced her SATs at 13 and started taking courses part-time at Towson the following year. Entering full-time with a 4.00 GPA at 15, she earned a music scholarship and membership in the Honors College. The 16-year-old is a sophomore this fall.

So, what does it take to turn out such successful offspring? Talent-rich genes don’t hurt, but credit the musically gifted mother, and thoughtful, driven father who together created a rare home environment in which the prodigies have flourished.

Charles and Cecylia, both from Poland, met at Yale University in the ’70s. She was doing postgraduate work. He was teaching and researching the commune movement of the ’60s and ’70s and the kibbutzim in Israel. He was also exploring how music could be used as a bridge to connect people, organizing conferences and festivals dedicated to the promotion of music as a tool for cultural, social and economic progress.

Cecylia Barczyk-Borowsky, a cellist and TU music professor, performs throughout the world and organizes Towson's International Cello Festival.

When Cecylia was offered the job at Towson, the couple moved to Baltimore and although their professional activities often kept them on the road, they were determined to create roots in their adopted hometown. They bought a house in Baltimore's modest northeast neighborhood of Hamilton in which to raise their family, and dedicated themselves to strengthening musical programs at TU, in Maryland and around the world. Cecylia attributes their values to their old-world backgrounds. "When you make a commitment," she says, "you stay for a long time, and you help to build up something."

"Both my wife and I come from families with great traditions," adds Charles, "... work, commitment, sharing and caring, have been highly valued."

Family Harmony

Twenty-five years later, they are fixtures in their community, and like the lush garden they have nurtured around their Hamilton home, their dedication has yielded much fruit.

As with all of his endeavors—running his company Intermuse, which manages and represents performing artists (including his family), writing books, giving lectures or serving as president of the International Institute for Suburban and Regional Studies—when it comes to raising his children, Charles brings a mammoth intellect and energy. Applying his academic conclusions about communal living and the positive power of music to the real-world in his own home, Charles oversaw

the homeschooling of his children, which allowed them the flexibility to pursue their performance careers. He designed a tight daily schedule detailing school subjects, meal times, exercise, chores, free time and, of course, practice time.

All three Borowsky children are enthusiastic about their home-school experience, saying that it eased the transition into college by emphasizing personal responsibility and allowed them the flexibility to globetrot. "We grew up going to concerts and conferences, devouring books of every sort, talking with people from around the world, and observing and listening," says Elizabeth.

"I actually learned to walk in Austria. In the Alps!" chimes in Frances-Grace.

For the Borowsky family involvement is a guiding principle. "We do things together and if something has to be done, everybody has to help," says Cecylia.

They plant, weed and harvest the multitude of fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs growing on their small city lot. The family welcomed visitors to their yard—a stop on the Hamilton home and garden tour—where Charles led tours and the others provided live entertainment on the porch. The Borowsky children were instrumental in helping their parents get the city to make their street one-way by going door-to-door with petitions. And everyone played a part in starting up a neighborhood soccer league.

Running the International Music Institute and Festival USA, an annual summer retreat for young musicians, is even a family act, with everyone pitching in to do artistic and administrative tasks.

Harmonious? Sure. But no childhood is free of frustration, and musicians endure more than their share as they learn to

take criticism.

Frances-Grace would get so mad during cello lessons with her mom that sometimes she'd just want to throw everything and storm out of the room. Instead she would gently put her cello down and then storm out. "But the next day or even a few hours later," says the youngest Borowsky, "I would go back to her and say, 'So, what were you telling me?'... I've learned that she does know best. She's amazing and if I want to be like her I have to work hard and keep my ears open as she always reminds me."

Despite normal tensions, this family has found the key to togetherness. And it's their achievements as a unit that make Charles particularly proud. He trumpets the family's invitations to perform pre-Olympic concerts in China last spring and to be artists and scholars in residence at Dilsberg Castle in Germany during the summer of 2008.

Speaking from that 800-year-old castle, Charles remarks that he has a view of the ancient structure's stone bridge. "But we have a better bridge, which is music," he says. "Music is the best bridge for all people." ■

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Elizabeth Borowsky '05

Wanda Haskel is a Baltimore-based freelance writer.