
in-depth

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Violin Voice

Deborah Shelkan
Remis honors
her family's past
through music.

BY SARAH G. LEVINE

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For Deborah Shelkan Remis, the fact that her father, Gregor Shelkan, was a Holocaust survivor and had lost most of his family as well as his first wife in the Holocaust was never a secret. “I think Holocaust survivors, or survivors of trauma in general, have their choice about how they deal with it, and my father, fortunately for us, told us about his experience,” she says.

Because his story is something she grew up with, she decided to put together *Sara’s Voice Sotto Voce*, a violin concerto that will take place on October 18 at the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport to honor violin virtuoso Sara Rashina, the wife her father lost to the Holocaust.

Remis says the concert actually began as a story she was working on for a creative writing class over a decade ago. “I put it away for the longest time...then I came back and I started writing about it again and I took another writing course. My [classmates]...thought it was, and rightfully so, nonfictional. That’s when I stopped writing, because I didn’t want it to be historical fiction; I wanted it to be fact. There were large chunks I didn’t know—I didn’t know how they met and I didn’t want to make that up.” While writing, she would listen to the music Sara had played during her promising career. It was this blending of words and music that sparked something in Remis.

“The more I wrote, I thought, ‘This isn’t the medium I want to tell her story in, I want to make this a violin concert.’ Because I think music really speaks volumes.”

Part of her research included a fact-finding mission. “I have been planning this trip to Latvia probably for as long as I have been writing this story. And every year there was another reason why I couldn’t go....

Deborah Shelkan Remis at Shalin Liu Performance Center





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“

AS A HOLOCAUST EDUCATOR, I NEVER DISCUSS THE SIX MILLION OR THE 11 MILLION BECAUSE IT'S TOO MUCH; YOU CAN'T WRAP YOUR MIND AROUND THAT. IT'S ABOUT ONE PERSON; IF YOU'VE GIVEN THAT PERSON BACK THEIR SOUL AND THEIR LIFE AND WHO THEY WERE, YOU'VE DONE A GOOD JOB.”

—Deborah Shelkan Remis

I don't know if that was because it was retracing my father's life.” This year, because of the concert, Remis went in search of more information—in Latvia. “I wanted to get pictures and see where they lived,” she says.

She visited the halls of the Jazeps Vitols Latvian Academy for Music, once the Riga Conservatory, where Sara had studied, as well as the Latvian National Opera, where her father had been a well-known and respected tenor before the Holocaust. She met with people from the Center of Jewish Studies at the University of Latvia and the Jewish Foundation of Liepaja, the town where her father was born and raised.

Remis says the most remarkable part of her trip was that she felt protected. “I really felt the presence of my father there. I don't know how to explain it,” she says. One day, she and one of her daughters, Rebecca, who accompanied her on part of the trip, went to her father's old apartment building and found the front door open. They were able to walk around the building and see the unit that her father had lived in. “I thought, ‘Wow, thanks dad,’” she says laughingly.

Remis says having finally taken the trip—one she was supposed to have taken with her father before he passed away—was incredibly powerful. “My steps commingled with their footsteps. For example, the day I went to the opera house and then walked to my father's house—he did that every day. I think that's pretty amazing to be able to do that.”

Another facet of Remis's desire to put on this concert

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is her own work with the One by One organization that brings together sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors and the descendants of the Third Reich. Remis was introduced to this organization when she was working as a Holocaust educator. Two representatives of the organization came to talk to her class and invited her to join them in Berlin for their second meeting.

She says, “It was probably the most life-changing event of my life. It was amazing to sit in a room for days with descendants of the Third Reich talking about how it affected them, and for the first time hearing that side of the story. And it was a way of opening the window for my daughters...showing them you can talk to the other side.”

For Remis, this history is a collection of the stories of individuals. “As a Holocaust educator, I never discuss the six million or the 11 million because it’s too much; you can’t wrap your mind around that. It’s about one person; if you’ve given that person back their soul and their life and who they were, you’ve done a good job.” This is another reason Remis is putting on the concert—to celebrate an individual young woman’s life that was cut short. It is *not* about mourning the entirety of the Holocaust.

She also wants the performance to spark dialogue among families; she would like for children to turn to their relatives and ask questions about their family’s history. Additionally, she wants to draw attention to what happened in Latvia. “[When talking about the Holocaust,] Poland is always mentioned, Auschwitz is always mentioned, Germany is always mentioned.



Violinist Diana Cohen will perform *Sara’s Voice Sotto Voce*

Photograph courtesy of Diana Cohen



Lynn Auditorium Presents

October 17th

Molly Ringwald - Revisits the Club

Full Screening of the Movie "The Breakfast Club", Followed by an hour long Q & A & Discussion with Molly Ringwald
Special VIP after-party tickets with Molly Ringwald also available!

November 5th

Steve Miller Band



Arts After Hours

October 9th - 31st

The Texas Chainsaw Musical

Based on the events that inspired the film, this hilarious bloodbath proves love really hurts.

Book by Christopher Minori,
Music/Lyrics by Cory Bytof.



Lynn Museum/LynnArts

November 14th, 7 PM - 11 PM

Paint it Black: The British Invasion Blast to benefit the Lynn Museum/LynnArts

Presented by Old Neighborhood Foods

Check www.LynnMuseum.org for more info.



Lynn's First Restaurant Week

October 5th - October 8th

Go to www.LynnAreaChamber.com for a complete list of restaurants.

The Blue Ox Restaurant & Bar

www.theblueoxlynn.com • 781.780.5722

Four Winds Pub & Grill

www.fourwindspub.com • 781.584.6374

Lazy Dog Sports Bar

www.lazydogoflynn.com • 781.477.1988

RF O'Sullivan's

www.rfosullivan.com • 339.440.4564

Rolly's Tavern on the Square

www.rollystavern.com • 781.599.2960

Rossetti's Restaurant

www.rossettirestaurant.com • 781.599.2051



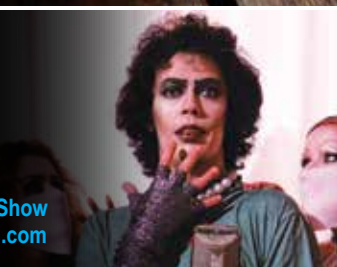
Rocky Horror Picture Show

October 30th

Grab your props, practice your lines and come to the [Lynn Auditorium](http://www.LynnAuditorium.com) to celebrate the

40th Anniversary of The Rocky Horror Picture Show

For info and tickets go to: www.LynnAuditorium.com



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Roman Rabinovich, an Israeli pianist, will accompany Diana Cohen.

Where's Latvia mentioned? Thousands and thousands and thousands of Jews were killed in Latvia long before any were killed anywhere else," she says.

Calgary Symphony violinist and concertmaster Diana Cohen will perform the concerto, accompanied by Roman Rabinovich, an Israeli pianist and winner of the

2008 Arthur Rubenstein International Piano Master Competition. Remis will narrate the story she began writing all those years ago—sharing the music Sara loved and telling the tragic story of her death in Rumbula Forest on November 30, 1941. **njs**

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