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Arts Council Smiles on Riverdalianians

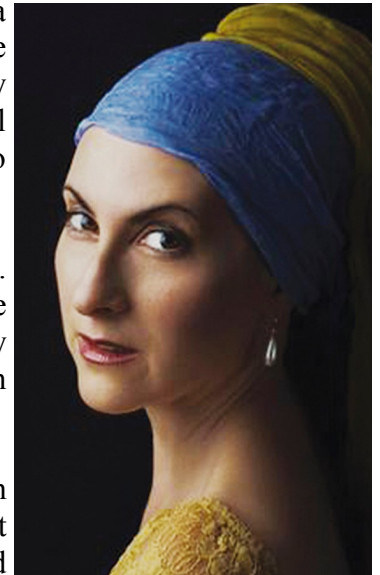
by Anthony Capote

Ilana Davidson was born into a family of music lovers. Her father was a composer, her mother a choral director and her uncle a vocal teacher. So from one point of view, the vocalist was destined to win six Grammy awards. She recently added a Bronx Recognizes Its Own (BRIO) award to her CV. The Bronx Council on the Arts gives the prizes to artists who excel in their fields and give back to their home borough.

“I love so much being a part of the artistic community in the Bronx,” said Ms. Davidson, 39. “To receive the BRIO award was such a different kind of pride for me as an artist because I feel a greater sense of accomplishment to be recognized in my own community.” She graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with a degree in vocal performance and a master’s from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

The artist has performed across the globe since then. Ms. Davidson is now based in Riverdale and is the co-artistic director of ClassicalCafé, a chamber music series that brings classical music to businesses in Riverdale. “We decided to see if we could bring classical music to cozy pubs and living rooms,” she said, “places where the audience wouldn’t normally get a chance to hear world-class chamber music.”

Ms. Davidson, with her associate Jing Li, a cellist, started the music series three years ago at An Beal Bocht Café on West 238th Street. “We wanted to bring our performances very close to the audience, so they can see the cello, they can see the singer and ask questions after,” she said.



Soprano Ilana Davidson
Photo courtesy of the artist.

The Bronx Council on the Arts smiled on other Riverdale musicians this year.

Pianist **Steven Lubin** trained at the Julliard School of Music and Harvard University and has performed in 15 countries.

A Riverdale resident since 1977, Mr. Lubin said he is “a big fan of Riverdale.” “I’ve played wherever the opportunity has arisen,” he said. “I’ve played concerts at Wave Hill a number of times. That’s a beautiful venue for me, where there’s a wonderful acoustic.”

Mr. Lubin, 73, a seven-time BRIO recipient, said he is proud to have won the award again. “[BRIO] is wonderful because it is municipal,” he said. “I particularly like the local aspect of it, it has to do with the Bronx and it has to do with playing in the Bronx.”



Pianist Steven Lubin performing at the Musashino Cultural Center in Tokyo, Japan, in October 2012. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Igor Begelman, 43, a clarinetist, moved to Riverdale with his wife 12 years ago. Like Ms. Davidson, the Ukrainian-born musician has a family background in music. “My mother, being a graduate of Moscow Conservatory, did see me as being involved [with music],” said Mr. Begelman. “But my mother teaching me wasn’t really working.”

Mr. Begelman’s difficulty concentrating on music and the piano in particular prompted his mother to seek out the strictest music instructor she could find, with little regard for the instrument he would learn. “It turned out that the clarinet teacher was a really great teacher, but also the strictest one out there,” he said. “That propelled me to pursue this on a more serious way than just a hobby on the side.”

Mr. Begelman attended a specialized high school in Ukraine before coming to the United States to study at Julliard. “I felt like I could be really an individual performer because I had a lot to say to the audience with my music,” he said.

In addition to performing as a soloist, Mr. Begelman is a professor at Brooklyn and Sarah Lawrence Colleges. He said teaching is fruitful for his own musical career. “When you are preparing a course or even coming up with a creative way to explain something to a student, you often come up with very interesting understandings, which you eventually apply to your own performances,” he said.

Mr. Begelman said he felt honored to receive the BRIO because of how important it is to keep the arts alive. “The arts have certainly been suffering over the years, especially lately, because there’s so much available with digital media,” he said. “Receiving an award as a performing artist is a great recognition of one continuous work for keeping this art alive.” ■



Clarinetist Igor Begelman
Photo courtesy of the artist.