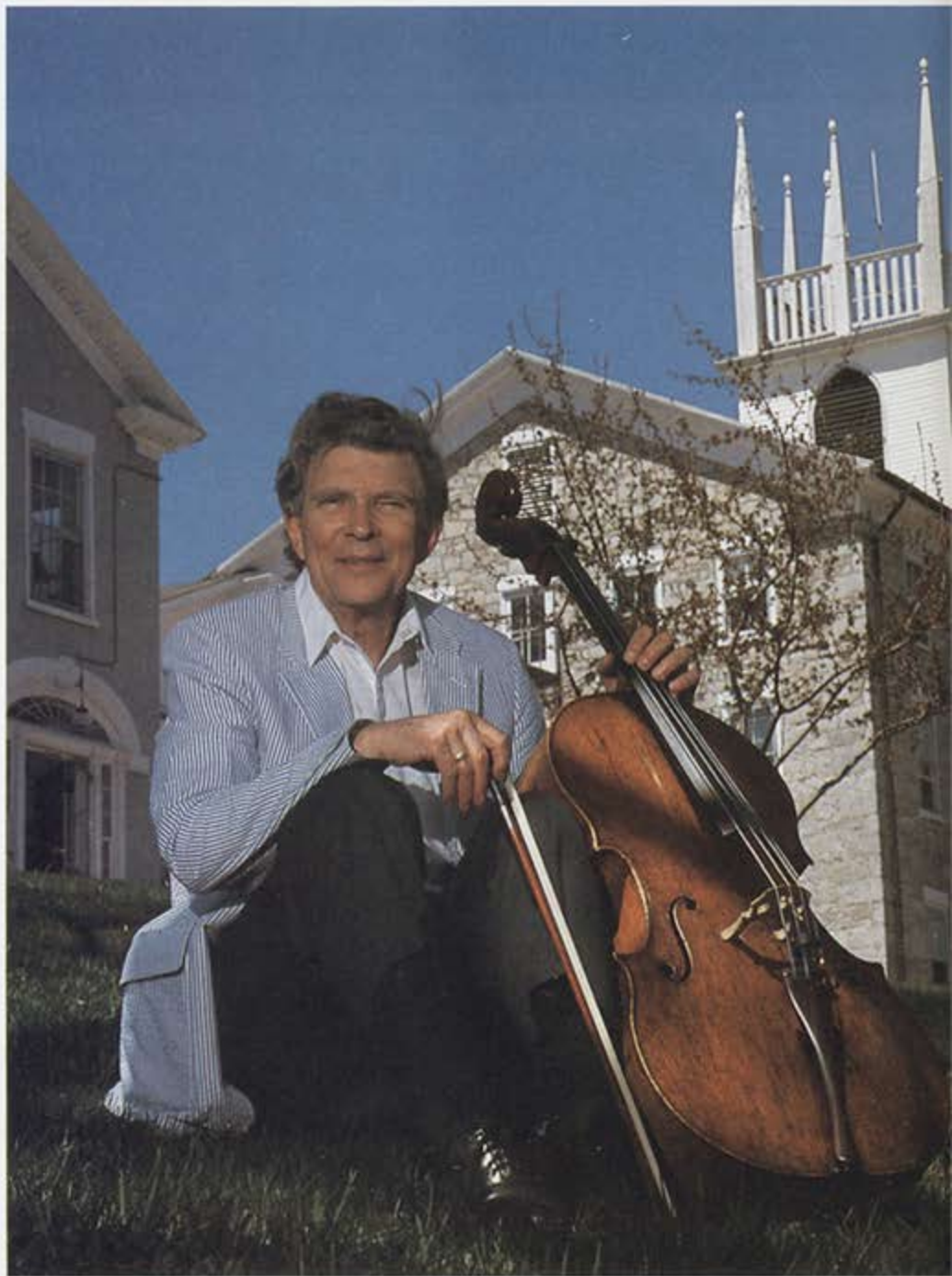


The Hills Are Alive...

But more than you imagine goes into making the sound of music

by Frederica Templeton
photography by Hubert Schriebl



THE MANCHESTER Music Festival turns 21 this summer. And, like any parent of an unpredictable adolescent, Director Michael Rudiakov is very much relieved that the difficult years of growing are apparently over. "We've had our share of financial and spiritual low points," he says. "None of us knew what we were getting into in the beginning. But we have had help from many friends who have made this festival a splendid success story."

The ability to attract friends has never been a problem for the tall, distinguished-looking Rudiakov with his

delightful European accent and continental wit and charm. But back in 1981 he brought quite a bit more than cultured manners with him when he joined the Manchester Music Festival staff. A cellist who practices several hours a day—every day—on a 1691 Grancino, Rudiakov has toured worldwide as a soloist and ensemble player and recorded over 30 albums. His music studies began in his youth with his father, pianist Elishu Rudiakov, and were completed at the Manhattan School of Music where he is now a faculty member.

His association with the Manches-

ter Music Festival began, oddly enough, not in Manchester but in China. He was there on tour with some other American musicians, among them Eugene List and his wife Carroll Glenn. List and his wife, summer residents of Manchester, had been presenting concerts at the Southern Vermont Art Center with various guest stars since the 1950s. By the time they met Michael in China, the husband and wife team had expanded their musical relationship with Vermont. They had made a long-held dream a reality by transforming their summer home into a Mecca for stu-



Michael Rudiakov—the
force behind the Festival

dents, musicians and music lovers—they called it the Manchester Music Festival. In China they asked Michael to join them.

The Lists were interested not only in Michael's musical ability but also in his administrative skills. The music festival business was not new to him. He was the producer of a concert series called "Chamber Music at Sarah Lawrence" in New York, an event the *New York Times* thought worthy enough to include on their list of recommended events that appeared in the paper every Friday.

Michael's new position took him out of the city and brought him to Vermont. Summer music festivals were becoming enormously popular. This move seemed to him to be an ideal opportunity—and an ideal place—to pursue his ambition to perform and to educate. But he soon found his city concert experience to be of extreme value because, unfortunately, both Lists died soon after his arrival. Only two years after joining the Music Festival staff, Michael found himself "with the whole thing falling into my lap."

Rather than abandon his new-found calling in Vermont, Michael decided to take on the directorship of the festival. In the years to come there would be times when he would question this decision. In fact, he now admits that the whole enterprise was much more challenging than he ever imagined it would be. The range of personal and professional skills required to keep the whole thing going was staggering, and Michael was responsible for every facet and detail. "But when times got tough," he recalls, "I would tell myself over and over that if I can't make a success of this, I can't do anything."

But make a success, he did. Today the Manchester Music Festival includes a series of summer evening concerts, as well as a number of special holiday concerts during the year. In addition there are more than 20 free concerts, a summer school where young preprofessionals have the opportunity to study with guest artists, summer music classes for children, a 15-piece orchestra which performs every fall at schools throughout New England and a resident chamber music group.

Michael is a survivor. This is what people say about him and perhaps this is



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what's made it possible for him to endure the dark days. Born in Paris, he grew up in Israel and is no stranger to the requirements for survival. His tenacity, he says, is inspired by the history of Israel. "The idea of something small that keeps growing was always with me from the beginning," he recalls. "I always believed the program should have a strong center, like a sun with rays that reach out to many places."

In the early years Michael's studio in his home in Riverdale, New York, doubled as the festival office. With a great deal of help from his wife, Judith, Michael managed to combine his career as a musician with the responsibility of running the festival. He describes his studio in those days as "littered with correspondence and papers on behalf of the festival. We were raising funds, managing the festival and handling all the mailings from my small office." He was also performing with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, touring with his cousin-in-law, pianist Shoshana Rudiakov, and teaching.

Amazingly, Michael found he was thriving on the combination of administration and performance. "I love to speak to composers and consult with them. I enjoy the challenge of creating something out of nothing, giving pleasure and knowledge to people. This is a different kind of teaching. I don't really mind the administrative duties. It gets me to people I wouldn't meet otherwise."

After his first year with the festival, Michael says, he came away with one simple idea: "I knew that without widespread community support, we would not survive."

In the 1980s the festival worked very hard to build visibility by performing for free. One year the festival players gave 40 concerts in 42 days in places as diverse as Mother Myrick's and bank lobbies. "One windy day," Michael remembers, "I brought a small orchestra to the little space in front of Factory Point Bank. We set up stands and even had laundry clips...but not enough. Passersby ended up

holding the music down while we were playing!"

From the beginning, Michael's instinctive flair for teaching made the Manchester Music Festival more than simply a series of concerts. He wanted to make this festival something special. "We weren't professional fund-raisers," he says. "We were only doing the festival to exercise our profession. But I realized quickly that to do well, we would have to do more than just perform in the summer." In 1985 the Manchester Music Festival began a two-week education program for children unique in the world of summer festivals.



Michael with son Ariel Rudiakov

The festival's Young Artists Program, a combination of summer classes and performances, became a well-respected summer program and has grown considerably since Michael's first year when "we had four cello teachers for five cello students!"

The Young Artists Concert Series today is noted for its variety, informality and high spirits. "It is magical," says Michael, "the way students arrive speaking four or five different languages and in just a few days are performing together beautifully." Sometimes it's also magical the way they arrive: one year a Japanese student took a taxi from JFK Airport to Manchester and the driver only charged him \$300.

Former board president Arthur Silverman attributes a good deal of the success of the festival to Michael's organiza-

continued

tional skills: "Aside from being a fantastic musician he is also a wonderful organizer and diplomat. He has foresight and vision. In all my years of working with arts groups I have never worked with a person as knowledgeable, as enthusiastic—as nice—as Michael." Or as dedicated. Ralph Bailey, former CEO of Conoco Oil, is the current president of the board and you might say the job came with his house. According to Michael, he "roped Ralph Bailey into the MMF business as soon as the ink dried on his contract to buy his house in Dorset. The previous owner, Mrs. Bernice Beyers, was a great friend to the MMF and a large donor. When she died, her son Robert sold the house to Ralph...I introduced myself over the phone as soon as they took possession."

Over the years the number of volunteers has grown steadily. Festival headquarters is now in a three-room office on Elm Street in Manchester, and a part-time secretary has allowed Michael to find the floor of his studio again. For the past three seasons the festival's Thursday night performances have been sold out, but for many years audiences weren't so easy to find, and neither was money. Former treasurer Norman Baldwin remembers the race to deposit the contributions collected barely in time to meet payroll. "Somehow we managed to stay one dollar ahead of the bills."

Michael tells a story about the early days which illustrates the energy, optimism, flexibility and sheer good luck it takes to run his organization. "For one summer fund-raising concert," he recalls, "we had to bring an upright piano to the home of Kathy Dickenson, the famous Marble House in Dorset. We had the large room all checked out—how many we could seat, where the food and refreshments would be, etc. But only a few hours before the event, we found we could not get the piano up the narrow stairs of that old house. So we had to play in the garden, which luckily has a natural setting for a stage. It threatened to rain, so we prayed. Then, just before time for the performance, the sun came out and the whole event turned out to be a great success."

Despite a little luck and a lot of hard work, in 1991 the festival found itself at a turning point. The various pro-

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grams needed to be expanded if they were to survive, but funds were short. Once again the sun came out, this time in the miraculous appearance of a musical angel holding a \$75,000 check which catapulted the festival to its next stage. A subscription series was created which made it possible to invite celebrated performers of international stature like Bernard Greenhouse, Jaime Laredo, Sharon Robinson, and Eugenia Zuckerman to perform in Manchester.

At 21, the festival is hitting its stride. Audiences are up, programs are now being offered year round and the festival's work has attracted the attention of important funders like the Mobil Foundation. Michael and Judith still divide their time between Manchester and New York where he continues to

THIS SEEMED TO BE AN IDEAL OPPORTUNITY —AND AN IDEAL PLACE—TO PURSUE HIS AMBITION TO PERFORM AND TO EDUCATE.

teach and to perform with the Brooklyn Philharmonic and she teaches at the Chapin School. Fortunately, the director now also has a young assistant, Ariel Rudiakov, his and Judith's 30-year-old son who has formed a permanent Manchester-based group called the Manchester Chamber Players, which has just released its first CD. He is also a part-time faculty member at Burr and Burton Seminary in their Arts in the Humanities Program and is an adjunct teacher at Bennington College.

Ariel could play anywhere in the world, but he chooses to remain with the Manchester Music Festival. "I can't see doing anything else," he said recently. "It's a great opportunity to really create something worthwhile through your own efforts. And besides," he adds with a broad smile, "where else could I get to work with my father!" ♦

Frederica Templeton is a Contributing Editor to this magazine.

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