

Moshe Hammer helps kids change their tune ? literally



By Brock Weir

From a very young age, Moshe Hammer was drawn to the violin.

He remembers being about six years old attending a wedding in Israel where he grew up, going right up to the band and very rarely leaving the side of the fiddler.

After returning home, the young Moshe began a driven campaign to get his parents to purchase him a violin of his own. Eventually, his hard fought campaign was successful and it turned out to be a very wise investment for his parents.

Since then, Mr. Hammer, now based in Toronto, has become a staple of the Canadian and International music scene, studying at Juilliard, working with icons like Yehudi Menuhin and Jascha Heifetz, and playing some of the most prestigious concert halls in the world.

Next Friday, however, he brings his talent to the Aurora Cultural Centre as part of the Great Artists Piano Series, sponsored by Aurora classical musicians and record producers Norbert Kraft and Bonnie Silver.

In a concert covering Kreisler, Dvorak, and Brahms Sonata No. 3, Mr. Hammer will be accompanied by Angela Park on the piano.

‘It’s special for me because the music director is Bonnie Silver and she is one of my most wonderful friends,’ says Mr. Hammer. ‘It adds a wonderful element. The intimacy [at the Centre] is very special. Those concerts are more for the audience. When you go to a concert hall, you’re lucky if you are 50 feet away. For an audience, it is very special to see the details that you cannot see from that third row in the balcony.’

Communication is also key for Ms. Silver.

‘He is the type of artist who has a special gift of communicating with audiences, establishing a personal connection, bringing classical music to life, reaching out and drawing people into the world of the huge emotional range of sound, all through the violin and his great stage presence.’

The violin strings certainly communicated with Mr. Hammer on that fateful day when he was a youngster.

‘My fate was sealed at that wedding,’ he laughs.

When asked why it spoke to him, he wonders why a writer writes or a painter paints. It is simply second nature. With music and art,

however, there are very few boundaries, such as age in forums like sport. Most classical musicians, he says, do it for love rather than for the money.

‘Playing the violin for people is doing something I completely love and it is one of my tools to communicate with the audience,’ he says. ‘I play very differently if I am at home than if I am in front of 200 people. If I have someone to communicate with, I play differently.’

It is a love he also hopes to communicate with budding musicians, and other youth who might not even realise there is a musician within. Seven years ago he formed The Hammer Band, a program which reaches out to inner-city and ‘at risk’ children. Without having to worry about the cost, these kids get a violin in hand, free music lessons, and a few lessons in life as well. Targeting what he describes as ‘priority areas’ in the GTA, it gives kids who would otherwise not be able to afford a lesson a chance to play.

‘The vision is to make them into better adults, not just having them play Beethoven or Hot Cross Buns,’ he says. ‘Children also learn how to listen, integrate into society, and how to become a good team member in a band. Parents and teachers tell us children are doing better in many ways. They seem happier, they seem to be a little better behaved, and some teachers tell us with utter surprise the kids hold the door for them.’

‘We are changing society one kid at a time. We help kids change their tune’ and hopefully inside themselves as well.’