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Family spreads music through Baltic states

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BY JARRAD HEDES Times Staff Writer |

Speeches, especially those political in nature, often leave an empty impression on Dr. Charles Borowsky.

"They are words not followed with deeds," the York Springs resident said.

Music, he contends, is the best bridge for all people.

"It not a slogan, its a reality," he explained.

The "reality" took on extra meaning recently for Borowsky and his family as it served as the theme for their 24-concert tour of the Baltic States in May and June.

Also known as the American Virtuosi, the family played major performance venues, universities, churches, synagogues, and community centers in Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.

Public officials including mayors, ministers of culture, rabbis, archbishops, and representatives of cultural and social organizations turned out for the tour, which was dubbed a "goodwill" trip by its organizers, the Intermuse Performing Artists Bureau.

"Our goal was to share our music and to learn from others," Borowsky said this week while attending a music conference at Mount Saint Mary's University in Emmitsburg. "We had one guest tell us if every diplomat was like you, there would be peace in the world. If politicians would listen to each other like musicians do, there would be a different tone in the world."

The Borowsky's composition, "In Memoriam" was premiered at Pa aīslis Muzikos Festivalis in Kaunas, Lithuania and repeated in several other Lithuanian cities.

The presentation, Borowsky noted, was in honor of the victims of the Soviet and Nazi oppressions in the Baltic States.

"Deportations," the first part of the program, depicts the terrifying experience of sudden capture and forced evacuation of homes at gunpoint.

"Countless people, including women and children, were deported by train in the middle of the night," said Charles' wife Cecylia Barczyk. "The music creates the atmosphere of night. A mother tries to put her baby to sleep by singing a lullaby. Later, there are knocks on the door and shouts to get out."

In the "Gulag," the captured arrive at their destination imposed by their oppressors and their worst fears were realized.

"They would not be going home anytime soon, if ever, Cecylia said. "The abhorrent conditions of the slave-labor camps meant that excruciating suffering and death was a daily experience. This movement based on a very well known melody about a prisoner who escaped

from the camp and later commits suicide rather than risk being caught."

Finally, the "Resurrection" sees the blood and tears become the seeds for freedom of the next generation.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania regained freedom and independence in the 1990s, most famously portrayed through the singing revolution.

"It's very moving," described Charles. "At one point many audiences got up and joined hands. Some were even brought to tears."

Music has been a Borowsky way of life for more than 40 years.

They have played countless shows in Americas, Asia, Middle East, and Europe.

The most recent tour was their third in the Baltic States.

Cecylia has given concerts, recitals, and master classes throughout Europe, Asia, North and South America and has appeared as a soloist with prominent orchestras in more than 80 countries.

Their children, Elizabeth, Emmanuel, and Frances, began performing at an early age and have performed together and individually in more than 35 countries.

"It was great to be able to use music as a bridge to not only communicate with people, but to be a catalyst to a conversation of souls," Emmanuel said of the Baltic tour. "We studied and looked into history of countries and hardships they went through. By composing a piece, we can then reflect even better on that. The knowledge doesn't go in one ear and out the other."

Frances co-composed the program and played cello during the tour.

"It was really amazing to see all the research and work come together and have it so well received by the Baltic audiences," she said.

It was a fast paced trip for Elizabeth, but she called it more inspiring than tiring.

"It was musically and personally intense," she said. "We were giving concerts every day but receiving so much energy from the people who came and then spoke with us afterward. It was so powerful to speak with them as this music is so important to them."

The family performed Friday night in Carlisle at an International Music Institute and Festival USA event. A York Springs performance is slated for July 24 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 216 Main St. They plan to return to Europe in November.

"I think the music is powerful no matter where you play it," Charles said. "It moves not only your ears, but also your heart and attitude."

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