

Three Genres of Art, Two Generations of Artists

By RUSS LANE
Staff Writer

Sometimes a passion to create travels along the family tree.

Often the children of famous artisans inherit the family business and follow their parents' paths in the arts.

Tonu Kalam, music director and conductor of the UNC Symphony Orchestra, continued his father's path of conducting, reveling in its demands to understand many different instruments and personalities of his musicians.

"Some people do it as a power trip, or as an ego thing, but what I like about it is that I like the sound of the orchestra, the way the instruments blend together," Kalam said. "I can create something with this music, and that is what I love more than anything else."

Born into a family of musicians, Kalam's mother mastered the piano and his father was an accomplished viola player and conductor. Spending the early years of their marriage in the Baltic state of Estonia, the Kalam family left their homeland for America following a Russian invasion in 1945.

After his initial attempts at breaking into the highly competitive world of orchestras proved futile, Kalam's father took janitorial jobs until finding a niche in orchestral music.

As his father's career flourished in America, Kalam displayed a prodigious talent as a pianist in his own right. To spite his talents, Kalam said the life as solo pianist did not fascinate him as much as conducting.

"It's been on my agenda for some time," Kalam said. "I always wanted to conduct because of my father."

As his interests in conducting grew, Kalam's parents nurtured their son's developing passion. Kalam's father would allow his son to lead him, sitting with the orchestra to follow Kalam's lead.

Eventually Kalam permanently took his father's podium following his tragic passing. Seated in the theater watching a performance, Kalam watched his father collapse onstage and pass away soon thereafter. With performances scheduled in advance, Kalam said he believed his father's concert should continue, so he led the chamber orchestra in his

father's absence.

"There were still concerts to be done after he died, so I took over conducting a half dozen shows. It was a nice rounding out, taking care of those few remaining concerts that he would have conducted. I tried to carry on the legacy that way."

Despite the unfortunate circumstance of his father's death, Kalam said his continuing conducting fulfilled a lifelong dream, which fueled his childhood games of "playing conductor."

"When I was a kid, I'd put on records and wave my arms around, following the score. Conducting was in my blood as early as 10," he said.

Like Kalam, "Passions" soap-opera star and recent UNC graduate Liza Huber also followed in her family's footsteps. The daughter of 30-year soap-opera veteran Susan Lucci, Huber said she has found her own audience.

"I think if you're a natural for performing you know from day one. Even at age 3, before I knew anything about what my mother did, I was dancing and acting, and putting on fashion shows ... I was always wanting to perform for people."

Receiving her undergraduate degree in Communications and Film Production, Huber discovered the UNC campus when visiting a friend at Duke.

"I just fell in love with (UNC). It is the quintessential American campus and such a wonderful school academically. I was thrilled that I spent four years of my life here," she said.

Trading her intense life as an aspiring New York actress to the slower pace of the South, Huber said her collegiate years focused on the more technical aspects of filmmaking and performance. Although she spent little time acting, Huber wrote screenplays and directed a documentary. Having learned the fundamentals of production at UNC, Huber returned to New York with a solidified focus on acting.

Regarding her career, Huber repeatedly describes herself as blessed since

the actor's obligatory starving artist stint lasted a surprisingly brief period. Catching the eye of industry representatives in John Patrick Stanley's off-off-broadway production of "4 Dogs and a Bone," Huber landed an audition in Los Angeles. To her surprise, the audition went well and landed Huber her role of Gwen Hotchkiss on NBC's newest soap opera, "Passions."

Although she learned the nuances of acting by her mother's example, Huber said her desire to act stemmed beyond her lineage.

"My brother and I are perfect examples ... I love performing and entertaining people, and he couldn't care less. There's a natural gravitation toward acting, something internal."

Of course, some realize their inner calling later than age 3. John Tempest, son of renowned painter Gerard Tempest, said his love of painting bloomed later in his life.

"I never intended to want to paint, it just hit me in 1980. It wasn't like a voice, but an inner realization that I had to paint," he said.

Tempest comes from a long lineage of famous painters dating back to the 1600s. Tempest's father Gerard studied under the father of metaphysical of surrealist painting, Giorgio de Chirico. Adapting de Chirico's style into portraits, Tempest's father founded his own style of painting - Abstract Spiritualism.

Abstract Spiritualism demands that a portrait should reflect a subject's soul as well as visage. Tempest strives for this lofty goal in each portrait, following the teachings of both his father and de Chirico. Tempest said his father's technical and spiritual influence directly impacted his work.

"My entire family is Christian, and (in our painting) we involve ourselves in a more spiritual undertaking," he said. "It's more real, more significant and more of a challenge because I'm going into the subject with the spiritual consideration of trying to capture their essence."

"Even at age 3, before I knew anything about what my mother did ... I was always wanting to perform for people."

LIZA HUBERT
Soap Opera Actress



DTH LAURA GIOVANELLI

Tonu Kalam conducts the UNC Symphony and is pictured above in a rehearsal Monday night. Kalam followed in his father's footsteps to become a symphony conductor.

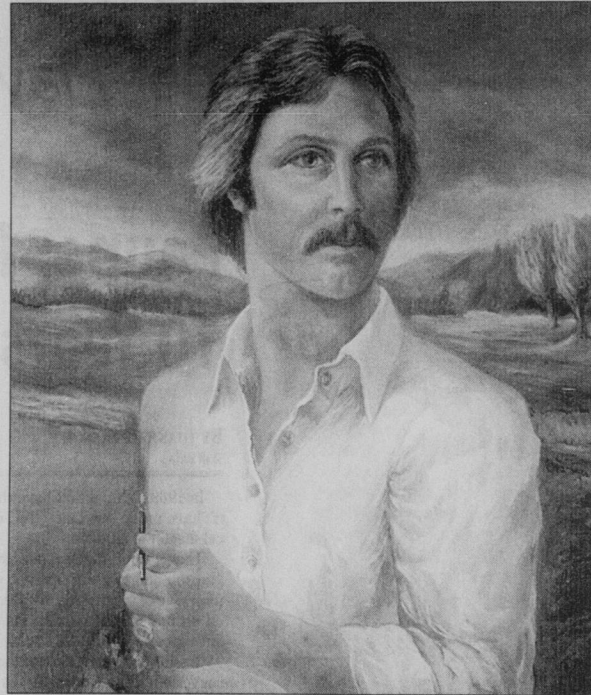
Although the family traveled throughout American and Europe, the Tempests place firm roots in the Triangle. Tempest, as well as his father and brother Roddy, attended UNC, and now live together in Durham.

Tempest was recently commissioned to paint a portrait of the Kenan family and the Hill family, founders of the Central Carolina Bank. Continuing his family's strong link with his father's mentor, Tempest said the newly constructed Giorgio de Chirico museum in the Italian mountains would feature a portrait Tempest painted of de Chirico's housekeeper.

"It's a very huge honor to be alongside paintings by the 20th century master," he said.

Although the three artists each have a burning desire to create, all said that their parentage and history provided them a backdrop for their shared passions. Tempest said the honor to continue his family's reputation in the arts was a combination of his internal desires for creating and the environment in which he was raised.

"I would hope to think that my bloodline is an influence, that painting was ingrained. And ever since I was a little boy I've been around it - so if that doesn't influence you, what will?"



UNC graduate John Tempest follows the lead of his father, creating paintings like the self-portrait above.

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