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Teen's talent takes him to Carnegie Hall

By Melinda Bargreen

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These days, it seems that teens make the news mainly because of all the things they shouldn't be doing: school violence, wild parties, reckless driving.

That's why we thought you might like to read about Derek Zadinsky, a terrific 17 year old kid who will be soloing with his school orchestra at Carnegie Hall this weekend then going on to the Sarasota Music festival and the Itzhak Perlman Music Program this summer.

Derek is the principal double bass of the Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestra, a group full of other outstanding kids who will be performing this afternoon at 3 p.m. in Benaroya Hall under the baton of Huw Edwards.

The list of honors and awards this junior at Skyline High School in Sammamish, has earned is already too long to print here; it includes several Washington Music Educators Association state championships, top honors in several regional competitions, and a solo with the Seattle Symphony under the baton of Gerard Schwarz.

None of this has swollen his ego -not when he and his friends in the school orchestra sport sweatshirts proclaiming "Dorkestra."

"We're not the coolest people on the campus," Derek laughs, "but we stick together and try to blend in, and we have a lot of fun."

Derek's idea of fun also includes playing in a big orchestra alongside Seattle Symphony instrumentalists to record the score for the upcoming movie "Stealth." His parents don't have to yell at him to practice, either, even though he is the son of two eagle eared professional violinists (Arthur Zadinsky, a first violinist with the Seattle Symphony, and teacher/performer Debra Zadinsky).

With all that violin playing in the family, how did Derek end up on the opposite end of the string spectrum, playing the biggest instrument in the orchestra?

"I played the violin for about two weeks," he confesses, "and I didn't like it. I also had started piano lessons at around 6. But in the fifth grade, when we had the opportunity to choose instruments at school, my best friend wanted to play the bass, and I wanted to hang out with him, so I picked it. too. Then I realized I really loved it."



This was not good news for the senior Zadinskys.

"They didn't like it," he admits. "Double basses take up a lot of space. Our living room is now called 'the double bass room' because the instrument doesn't fit in my bedroom. Well, at least it doesn't fit most of the time. Sometimes, in the summer when I have time to clean up my room, I can squeeze it in."

The bass, as the instrument is formally is called, also is no picnic to transport. Out of its case, the bass weighs 30 to 40 pounds, depending on its size (most players play a 3/4-size or 7/8-size instrument). In its flight case, ready to make an expensive trip in an airplane's cargo hold, the bass barely makes the 100-pound limit most airlines impose.

This is not the instrument for your economy-size subcompact car. In order to fit into most standard sedans, the front seat has to be folded down.

Hatchbacks, sport-utility vehicles and vans are usually the vehicle of choice for transporting the double bass. The Zadinskys also must contend with insurance policies that don't cover instruments stolen out of automobiles.

During our interview, restaurant patrons' eyes bulge as Arthur Zadinsky wheels in his son's enormous instrument, which looms over our table like the guest of honor.

Fortunately, restaurants don't charge the instrument the way airlines do: Debra Zadinsky said one airline wanted almost as much money to store the bass in the cargo hold as to fly coach class in the cabin to a recent East Coast audition.

"Don't they have one of these where you're going?" inquired the helpful airline employee.

What she didn't realize is that double basses vary so much in size, shape and other specifications that a player can be at a serious disadvantage on an unfamiliar instrument: that G-sharp you're reaching for could be just a little further up or down the neck of the bass, and you're playing out of tune.

Derek loves his bass, a modern Italian Neapolitan instrument built in 1999 and purchased in Albuquerque, N.M., at Robertsons & Sons, a store Derek calls 'just like Disneyland for me. There were 40 basses in one room! The row in back was reserved for the really fine instruments, ones in the \$50,000-\$300,000 range. Mine was a lot less, fortunately."

The last few weeks have been unusually stressful, with Derek racing to performances, competitions, rehearsals and lessons with Seattle Symphony principal bass Jordan Anderson.

Derek is cramming extra work into the next few weeks so he can leave school early and go to Florida's Sarasota Music Festival. After that is the Perlman Music Program on Shelter Island on Long Island, N.Y., where students sign a contract to practice from 8 a.m. to noon everyday. Cell phones are confiscated from evening until noon (partly because some stage moms reportedly demanded that their students practice into the cell phone so they could listen to the practice session).

Currently a high-school junior, Derek is eyeing several colleges and conservatories across the country. He auditioned this year for the one spot available at the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and was a top finalist but didn't win, so he will return to finish high school in the fall. Maybe next year.

Meanwhile, Derek and his family are concerned that other youngsters will have more trouble following in his footsteps. The school program he entered as a fifth-grader has been cut; now it's a "before-school" activity, for which parents must pay \$200 and bus their kids to the middle school.

"Two years ago, half the elementary school kids played instruments," says mom Debra. "Now, after the funds were cut, one-tenth of them play. Parents are working hard to restore the program, but administrative support is also badly needed."

Derek says school music programs are "definitely worth all the work. A lot of kids will not go on to be professional musicians, but they will always love music and go to concerts. They are able to see themselves practice hard and get better every day. This is such a great art form that it should always be in our lives."