

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

BOB & JAN KAZIMOUR



Robert and Janis Kazimour's nearly five decade history with the Orchestra comes with an unlikely backstory. While they both thoroughly enjoy listening to the live performances, their initial motivation for attending concerts had little to do with an affinity for classical music.

Growing up, Bob was more into basketball, boxing and other sports than the symphony, opting for athletic arenas instead of concert halls. Ironically, a fateful punch in a golden gloves match ended his stint with the trumpet.

Jan's upbringing, however, was surrounded by sound. Not only did she play with the Arlene Boddicker Accordion School, but her father was a professional drummer in a contemporary orchestra during the big band era, performing throughout the Midwest. In Cedar Rapids, he would frequently fill in for music shows on WMT-AM and with bands that had travelled to town. Even today, a picture of Jan's father with Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden rests proudly on the Kazimour's wall. Jan fondly recounts a memory of her mother inviting Armstrong and a couple of his band members over to their house for lunch before one of his shows. Needless to say, Jan's childhood was full of music, if not exactly classical.

It was years later, after Bob and Jan had moved back to Cedar Rapids after Bob's time in the Air Force, that Jan felt it would be a good idea to become reacquainted with her hometown after a long absence. She decided to attend a meeting of the local New Comers Club where she met Fran Quetsch. Fran, and her husband Richard, were big supporters of the symphony, and it was with Fran's encouragement that Jan eventually joined the Women's Committee of the Symphony (a committee she would later preside over as President). The Women's Committee provided a learning opportunity and sparked a new interest for Jan.

Over the years, the Kazimours continued to support the orchestra and regularly attended concerts. But, in the end, it would be on an overseas trip where Jan and Bob would cement their relationship with the symphony. The year was 1990 and the Kazimours, along with a small group of other Cedar Rapids area people, travelled to Russia to deliver medical supplies to hospitals and continue a "sister city" relationship which was being developed. During the trip, their volunteer efforts were televised on a local news station. When the Kazimours returned to their hotel later that day, they were greeted by a determined woman and her young daughter who had seen the TV coverage. The woman was Marina Sacharova and she saw an opportunity to provide help for her daughter, Julia. The girl was an eleven year old child prodigy violinist afflicted with a severe cleft palate, a condition not treated in Russia at the time. Marina insisted the Kazimours hear Julia play and then implored them to take her daughter to America and "fix" her so that she would be considered "more acceptable in appearance" to pursue a professional career.

Impressed by Julia's obvious talent, and moved by her mother's plea, Bob and Jan returned home and helped procure the funds and paperwork necessary to bring Julia to the U.S. for surgery. It was a long and frustrating effort, but eventually Marina and Julia arrived and the surgery was successfully performed. Following several weeks of recovery, Julia returned to Russia with Marina so she could be able to completely commit herself to practicing music. Determined to find a proper violin instructor, they moved to Moscow, sleeping in doorways until they could find housing.





Despite the difficulties and distance, the Kazimours kept in touch with Marina and Julia. So years later when Julia received a partial scholarship to attend Oberlin College & Conservatory in Ohio, they were happy to help contribute to her room and board. She graduated with honors and went on to receive her Masters at Juilliard in New York City.

Then, during Orchestra Iowa's 2005/2006 season, they were finally able to celebrate the success of the young girl they helped so many years ago. Julia Sakharova performed on stage at the Paramount Theatre as the featured soloist during the Sibelius Violin Concerto. Her performance was lauded and her reunion with friends from long ago at that chance meeting made the experience all the more memorable. Julia is married, now, with a young son of her own. She and her family live in St. Louis, Missouri where she and her husband are members of the music faculty at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Julia plays and travels with the internationally known Arianna String Quartet.

The Kazimours exemplify the meaning of the word advocate. They embody, completely, the philanthropic qualities which allow non-profit organizations, like Orchestra Iowa, to exist. They give from their heart and they love sharing their experience with friends in the community. And, more than anything else, they are a reminder that going to hear the orchestra is more than enjoying the music. It provides a perfect setting to gather with long-time friends and new acquaintances. ■

Article by Alexis Dagit
 Portrait by Alisabeth Von Presley
 B&W Photos provided by the Kazimours

Opposite Page: Jan's father is pictured with fellow musicians, including Jack Teagarden & Louis Armstrong. Above: Bob & Jan Kazimour at the Crescendo Gala. Below: Jan playing the accordion.

