



# A LEGACY OF MUSIC – THE EDUARD AND OLGA RIISNA - NADIA ROOSE FUND PROMOTES EXCELLENCE IN MUSIC IN ESTONIA

**AWARD-WINNING TELEVISION PRODUCER ENE RIISNA'S LOVE FOR MUSIC, FOR HER PARENTS AND FOR HER HOME COUNTRY ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED. WITH HER HUSBAND JAMES GREENFIELD, A FORMER EDITOR AT THE NEW YORK TIMES, SHE ESTABLISHED A LEGACY FUND TO SUPPORT FUTURE GENERATIONS OF TALENTED MUSICIANS AND COMPOSERS IN ESTONIA.**

Music has an enormous significance in Estonia for many reasons, says Ene Riisna. For one of the smallest countries in the world, Estonia has indeed produced a large number of musicians, performers and composers. Each county has had its own choir for centuries. During the Estonian Song Festival, held in the capital city Tallinn every four years since 1869, choirs from all over the country perform music in their folk costumes.

#### **THE SINGING REVOLUTION**

“Even during the Soviet occupation from 1944 to 1991, a 20,000-strong choir would sing local folk songs and the country’s national anthem on a hill by the sea, with 200,000 people in the audience sitting on the grass,” says Riisna. “There was no way the Soviets could arrest 200,000 people.”



“Estonians kept their language, their music, their choirs. Music was the glue that helped hold the country together throughout the occupation,” adds Riisna. Ultimately, it was the ‘Singing Revolution’, with various protests and acts of defiance held over four years, which led to the restoration of the independence of the Baltic States -Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania- in 1991.

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### **IT STARTED WITH A BEAUTIFUL LIFE**

“I was born in 1938 in Estonia, at the time practically a perfect world,” Riisna says. “My father Eduard was a lawyer and member of parliament. He played the violin, my mother Olga played the piano. Their closest friend Nadia Roose, who I call my aunt, was their audience. We had a country house on the sea, a beloved nanny, and a dog and a cat.”

That life changed in 1940, when the Soviets started their military occupation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Then, in 1941, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union and invaded the Baltic States. “The turmoil started in the year I was born,” Riisna says. “But it really didn’t touch us too hard until my father was jailed by the Germans in 1944. They systematically swept up people who were educated, influential or wealthy. My father was active in the resistance and was warning Jewish families to leave. Many who the Germans had imprisoned were killed. But my mother befriended someone who helped get my father released from jail in late summer 1944.”

That was the year the Soviet Union recaptured most of the Baltic States. “My father got hold of several small boats and started helping people out of the country,” Riisna says. “Then we got a message that the Soviets were looking for him. We took some friends and managed to escape.”

Her aunt Nadia Roose and some other friends and relatives stayed behind, because they believed the allies would soon free the country. “Of course, they were wrong,” Riisna says. “We steered our little boat through stormy waters towards Sweden. The engine failed and the boat was leaking. At the end, we were very lucky that the Swedish coast guard was out in international



waters. They saved our lives. I was just six years old but I remember it very well. I can close my eyes and be back there. It's a story of immigrants. It's a story of refugees."

#### **NEW BEGINNINGS IN SWEDEN - THEN FORWARD TO CANADA**

"The Swedes were incredible," Riisna says. "They organized refugee camps, very good ones. Within 18 months they found work for my father, first as a logger and then at a bank. They got us an apartment and some basic furniture and housewares. I still have the kettle we used there. Swedish families took us into their homes for holidays. They were extraordinary."

When Riisna was 13, her parents realized they would not be able to return to Estonia, now behind the iron curtain. "They decided that we would have more of a chance of a better future in the United States. But our application was turned down because of quotas. So we applied to Canada, and were accepted as we had a cousin in Toronto who was willing to sponsor us."

#### **A LITTLE HELP MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE**

Riisna's experiences in her early life shaped her decisions to support philanthropic causes. "People have extended a hand to me all through my life. I know first-hand the big effect just a little bit of help can have. In Sweden people collected clothes for us. In grade school there, one of my teachers helped me apply for a scholarship to a private school. When I arrived in Canada, a teacher offered to teach me English every morning before classes. Those small acts of support made a big difference" says Riisna. "They may not have made such an impression on someone with a more stable life, but I remember every single one of them."

#### **SUPPORTING YOUNG MUSICIANS**

Riisna finally went back to Estonia as a journalist in 1980, and reconnected with her early life. "I found my aunt Nadia, and she became my Estonian angel. She had survived years of Soviet occupation and deprivation with her spirit, optimism, and love of life intact. This year she turned 100. Nadia Roose was the last one

of my family and their circle, my link to my Estonian past, the one who remembers our life. She took me to concerts in Tallinn, and she brought Anu and Kadri Tali into my life - twins who at age 26 founded their own orchestra in Estonia.”

“My husband Jim and I have no children,” Riisna says. “We have a trust that will give away money at the end of our lives to several causes, including to the Nordic Symphony Orchestra that Anu and Kadri Tali have made into a success.” They bring together musicians from the world’s leading orchestras and present the best of classical repertoire as well as contemporary and less well-known music, with special attention to Estonian, Scandinavian and Russian composers. When the government withdrew funding for the arts due to the financial crisis in 2008, Riisna and her husband began supporting its activities with small gifts and fundraising.

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### **A LASTING COMMITMENT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS**

Soon thereafter, they began to explore how they could make a more lasting gift to the orchestra, and stimulate new generations of talented musicians and composers in Estonia. “Jim and I discovered that it’s not simple to give money away internationally,” she says. “We consulted with lawyers and went through a lot of different permutations. And then our estate planner recommended Myriad USA (formerly KBFUS).”

Myriad USA makes it easy for donors to establish a legacy fund that will make gifts in their name, forever or for a specific number of years, to support the causes or organizations they love, anywhere in Europe or Africa.

“Myriad USA is the only organization we found that will be able to fulfil our wishes, and manage and protect the money we are leaving. I decided to open a legacy fund with them, to be funded through a charitable bequest. Working with Anu and Kadri Tali, they will distribute fellowships to talented young musicians and composers in Estonia.”

The ‘Eduard and Olga Riisna - Nadia Roose Fund for Excellence in Music’ was named for Riisna’s parents, who met as musicians, and for her aunt Nadia. “I wanted to honor the three of them because they brought joy and music into my life,” concludes Riisna.

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