

SYMPHONY

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EUGENIA ZUKERMAN

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EUGENIA

For years Eugenia Zukerman has heeded Charles Kuralt's guideline: If you're doing a story on a sunset, you need a sunset, not words. This simple, yet profound, advice works for television, where, as arts commentator and interviewer for "CBS Sunday Morning," Zukerman has prepared more than 200 shows since her 1981 debut. She has put musicians and other performing artists, orchestras, music festivals, and a variety of arts institutions onto the screen, giving them respectful credit and bringing their essence into millions of homes.

If only Kuralt's advice adapted to the printed page, this article about Zukerman could come alive with the sounds of her flute, glow with her quiet elegance, turn toward the reader,

and say, "But enough about me. I want to know about you." Lacking such sonic and visual assistance, words will have to do.

"People say I should be on camera more, but for me that's not the point," she says of her Sunday morning appearances on the CBS show. "One of the things I enjoy most about it is that it's not about me. In the other part of my life I am always under excruciating scrutiny. 'Look at her shoes, look at her gown, listen to her playing.' I accept that, and it doesn't bother me any more. But for me, doing an interview is a way of giving and facilitating someone else's opportunity to tell their story. I have a great love for musicians and want to capture their essence."

One of her recent subjects, Xiao-lu Li, music director of the Acadiana Symphony in Louisiana, speaks glowingly of her work. "What a great example, that she travelled so many miles from New York City to get the story of us in this little town. We tried to present our lives and the quality of our music. As a little guy in this country, I see that people have a negative attitude. Best is to promote what you do and work together for positive things. Eugenia's position is so positive for all of us. It's fantastic that CBS brings these things.

"She was in my living room interviewing me. She was going to be there for one hour, but actually she was there for four hours. In the middle of the interview she made the camera stop, because I tell her a little story, just

a little story, but she was so moved she had tears, so she stopped the camera."

The Acadiana Symphony executive director (and a concert pianist), Geraldine Hubbell, echoes Li's admiration. "I've never seen as well-rounded a performer and musician. Our musicians loved her. She paid attention to the orchestra and knew exactly how to talk with them, what to say, what questions to ask. Everything is genuine about her. She has a quiet dignity."

Robert "Shad" Northshield, the creator of the "CBS Sunday Morning" program, apparently saw all those qualities when he invited Zukerman, then inexperienced in television, to join the show in 1981. "I credit Shad with having the vision and the genius to develop the show," she says. "Also, he understood, since he knew that I was a writer and a performer, that even though he didn't know if I could do the job, still, he understood that I'm in the music field, so I would be able to speak to people on their level—from the inside. The same with Billy Taylor. When Billy and I talk to people, we speak their language, and they can trust us not to ask something brilliant like, 'How do you get your two hands so well-coordinated?' I'm very lucky I've been given this platform. It's taken me a long time to realize, recognize, acknowledge that I have a gift for interviewing."

Such self-knowledge has come slowly, perhaps, because, as she says, "I was never an assertive person. I remember telling my best friend when I was fifteen that I wanted to be the muse to a great poet. I really believed that; we all bought into that world. When I think that when I was a little girl in the 1950s, my mother, who is an intelligent, talented woman, couldn't go anyplace unless she was dressed properly! Her big worries were whether she had a hat to match the handbag."

Zukerman's quiet manner may have changed little over the years, but she says she has learned the importance of being assertive. "I have two extraordinary daughters: Arianna [age 21] is a singer, finishing at Juilliard. She's very strong. Natalia [19] is at Oberlin. They have good studio arts

at Oberlin, if you persist. And she got in by insisting. I've harped on their not taking 'no' for an answer. It's hard. Women have to discover a language of dissent that doesn't make them sound querulous or whiny or quarrelsome."

MANY HATS. Surprising as it may seem, given her frequent "CBS Sunday Morning" appearances, Zukerman continues not only to write (she has novels, screenplays, and feature articles for national publications to her credit), but also to maintain a busy concert schedule as flute soloist and ensemble player. "Only in extraordinary circumstances—for instance, if I'm travelling all day—do I not practice. It's like my daily catechism." Although most of the music on her many recordings was composed in the 17th through 19th centuries, she constantly adds 20th century music to her repertoire.

Occasionally she wears more than one hat at a time, engaging in impromptu performances with musicians she interviews. John Sant'Ambrogio, principal cellist of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and former director of Strings in the Mountains, in Steamboat Springs, recalls her visit to Colorado to do a piece on the festival for CBS. "Eugenia was great, of course. She has a lot of spunk and is able to do many, many things. She's a very dedicated person who always goes for the human element in her work. And she's a wonderful musician, too. We played chamber music together on the festival program."

Zukerman's musicianship so excited Xiao-lu Li that he invited her to travel next spring to China for concerts. "She's a world-class flute player, willing to go everywhere to bring a positive message. In late spring she will go with me to the Shanghai Philharmonic and to the Shanghai Conservatory. I want to make sure that people know about this role model: going to China, there's not one penny involved. She's willing to do anything to help."

For Zukerman, helping means communicating, both through playing music and through interviewing musicians. "There's so much to be proud of and to celebrate," she says. "I can be-

lieve privately that classical music represents the highest achievement in music in the last 500 years, but the minute I'd say such a thing, I would perpetuate the formality and isolation that exists. I want to de-mystify classical music. It is not for the elite, but it is for the informed. So at "CBS Sunday Morning" we inform.

"I'm lucky. Some interviewers, for whom interviewing is their whole life, seem to need to make their own point and to be part of the interview. The interview becomes two celebrities talking. Fortunately, I don't need that. I just did an interview with Bill T. Jones that was so wonderful, because *he* is. He said such poignant and truthful things, and I learned so much about life and music. When I sit opposite a performer, I'm so aware of their intense commitment to the art that it affects me deeply. I find that the next day I practice differently, with new insights."

Asked about the network's support of the Sunday program over the years, she says, "Howard Stringer, president of the CBS Broadcast Group, calls it 'the jewel in the crown.' They are thrilled to have such a fine show. It means a lot to everybody that we bring so much cultural news."

Zukerman says that she is becoming more positive as she gets older. She regards American orchestra musicians as the most committed in the world and admires the healthy influence that orchestras have on their communities. Her belief in the communicative power of music and her enthusiasm for "connecting with simple, everyday people," as she says, inspire the energy that goes into her work, both performing and interviewing. Giving frequent credit to the team of camera operators, sound crew, editors, and producers who work with her on the show, she avoids taking personal credit for having such a positive effect.

"I'm always astonished when I hear people say they think I've done a lot, because I don't think I do. I'm just grateful that I have this opportunity."

—Sandra Hyslop