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Natasha Korsakova's "Masterworks" performance Oct. 5 at the Roanoke Performing Arts Theatre will be her American concert debut.

Marco Borggreve

# Model musician

Violinist Natasha Korsakova, who is scheduled to play with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra, is also a model.

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It's no surprise that Natasha Korsakova became a musician. She grew up in Moscow as part of what she called "a very musical family" — her ancestry comprises six generations of musicians, among them the great Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

Her Russian father, a violinist, and Greek mother, a pianist, traveled often and per-

formed concerts together. "I was strongly fascinated by the stories they told about different countries they'd been to, so I kind of grew up between the Eastern and Western world," she wrote in an e-mail.

Korsakova, who is scheduled to play with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra on Oct. 5, is a phenomenon in Europe. Last year, Italy bestowed an Artist of the Year award upon her — much to her surprise. She had just played a George Gershwin tune on live television and didn't know what the award she

was about to receive would be.

"The first moment felt unbelievable, but I had to give an interview immediately after!"

Roanoke Symphony Orchestra conductor David Stewart Wiley heard considerable buzz about Korsakova during a recent trip to Europe, and decided to invite her to perform with RSO. He called her "an amazing musician."

She's played recitals in the United States before (more than a decade ago) but when she appears at the symphony's season open-

ing "Masterworks" performance at the Roanoke Performing Arts Theatre, it will be her American concert debut.

Korsakova, who says she's in her early 30s, began taking piano lessons when she was 3 years old, but her mother was convinced the violin would suit her better. When she was 5 years old, she received her first violin lesson, from her grandfather.

"I liked it right away," she wrote.

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# MUSICIAN: Father inspired her

FROM 1

No child younger than 7 wants to practice violin every day, "but my grandfather did a fantastic job to teach me both in a serious and entertaining way."

Following in her father's footsteps was a challenge as she began performing publicly. Andrei Korsakov's reputation loomed so large that often when she went to a venue to play she would be greeted with the words, "We are very curious how you are going to play this concerto. Your father did it fantastic!"

She felt she had to fight at times to step out of his shadow, she said.

At the same time, her father was her teacher and her source of inspiration, and his sudden death in 1991 deeply affected her. Yet the tragedy also provided an opportunity, though a high-pressure one — he had been scheduled to play in more than 50 concerts worldwide that year, and she took his place. The results established her reputation as a masterful performer.

Through uncles and cousins on her father's side, she is related to composer Rimsky-Korsakov, best known for his symphony "Scheherazade," inspired by the central character of Arabian Nights. During her studies in Germany, where she now lives, Korsakova passed on an opportunity to play a solo in order to be concertmaster for a performance of "Scheherazade," leading the violin section and playing the violin solos. She called it a "beautiful experience."

Wiley noted that she plays a Vincenzo Panormo violin built in 1770, an instrument that is itself a "historical work of art."



Marco Cambiaghi

Natasha Korsakova wears clothes created by Italian designer Laura Biagiotti, who happens to be a family friend.

One of the things that distinguishes Korsakova in the world of classical music: She's also a fashion model. She wears clothes created by Italian designer Laura Biagiotti, who happens to be a family friend. Korsakova said she enjoys being "a model with a violin."

Wiley said he heard Korsakova's recording of Johannes Brahms' "Violin Concerto in D Major" years ago and was impressed with it. She'll play that composition with the symphony on opening night.

Korsakova wrote that the Brahms concerto has special meaning for her. Her father practiced it often at home, so she knew it by heart by the time she was 10. She wanted to play it herself, but her father declined to teach her.

"My father wanted me to wait at least for some years,"

she wrote. "It made me angry as I was too young, now however I only can say he was absolutely right!"

You need to accumulate life experience before you can play the piece properly, she said. "This is one of the most difficult, beautiful and romantic concertos existing."

The symphony will also perform Franz von Suppe's "Light Cavalry Overture," Richard Strauss' "Don Juan, op. 20" and Arturo Marquez' "Danzon no. 2."

Before the concert, Wiley will give an informal talk called "Illuminations" to familiarize the audience with the night's music. And there will likely be encores intended as surprises for Korsakova. Attendees "will hear one or two surprises related to her lineage," Wiley said.