

# Retired Charlotte Symphony violist pays tribute to mom with endowed chair

By Michael J. Solender

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Ali Kavadlo, retired principal violist for the Charlotte Symphony, can't remember a time when she played professionally where she didn't wonder what her mother might think seeing her onstage.

"Of course I imagine she'd be very proud," said Kavadlo, 67. "Music was such a large part of her life and she made certain it was part of my life as well. Unfortunately she died at such a young age, 54, that she never had the opportunity to see me play professionally."

Kavadlo paid her mother the ultimate Mothers' Day tribute by endowing the Zoë Buntin Merrill Principal Viola Chair with the orchestra. She was to appear Saturday night during a ceremony before the orchestra's concert.

The chair is a gift from Kavadlo, who retired last year after 36 years with the symphony, her husband Gene, symphony principal clarinetist, and friends and supporters who raised the money to endow the chair.

Part of the funding came from the sale of a William Carboni viola Ali Kavadlo's father had made for her as she began her career.

"We are honored that Ali and Gene have chosen to honor her mother by naming the chair that Ali so capably filled for so many years," said orchestra President Robert Stickler. "Not only does this naming provide a lasting memorial, but it helps support the Symphony financially."

A donor may name a chair to acknowledge an institution, memorialize a family name or celebrate an individual through a contribution to the symphony, said Jamie Wolf, the orchestra's communications manager. Donors help

## • Season finale

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra's season finale, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, is 8 p.m. May 10, 11 and 2 p.m. May 12 at Belk Theater.

**Details:** 704-972-2000; [carolinatix.org](http://carolinatix.org).

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offset expenses; more than 50 percent of the group's budget goes to salaries and benefits. Currently, 13 of the more than 60 orchestra chairs are named.

## **Mother's encouragement**

Zoë Rose Bunten Merrill grew up in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and graduated from Vassar College at age 20 with a degree in mathematics in 1935. She did post-graduate studies in mathematics at Heidelberg University in Germany.

When Ali Kavadlo was a year old and her sister was 4, her parents moved to Farmington, N.M., where they lived for 15 years.

"Mother sang in the church choir and encouraged me and my sister, Yvonne, to do the same," said Kavadlo. "We had a piano on which she would accompany family sing-alongs and later me on the violin and my sister on the clarinet."

When the Santa Fe Opera opened, Merrill would make the 10-hour round trip to Santa Fe so the children could experience opera. She once walked on crutches and in a foot of snow to hear Kavadlo play in a school concert. She'd broken her leg that morning and, had driven herself to the hospital.

Kavadlo said some of her fondest memories are her mother's commitment and care of her when she had polio at age 5.

"Mother made the eight-hour round trip to Albuquerque so that I could have physical therapy," recalled Kavadlo. "We'd leave at 5 a.m. and she'd go to work after returning home. This routine lasted for months."

## **Lasting tribute**

Kavadlo said her parents encouraged her as she showed promise with violin early in her life. Years later Kavadlo switched to viola.

"They certainly sacrificed financially for me to have lessons," said Kavadlo. "They were always encouraging. I never felt pushed, but instead always supported, especially by my mother."

While her mother had seen Kavadlo's play with youth orchestras and string quartets, it was during Kavadlo's first semester in graduate school when Merrill fell ill to the colon cancer that eventually took her life in 1968.

"It gives me unspeakable joy to be able to honor her with this tribute," said Kavadlo. "It means so much to me on so many levels as when my mother passed, she was cremated with her ashes scattered in the desert in New Mexico. She doesn't have any sort of permanent marker; this is a fitting tribute to her and her incredible accomplishments. She was truly a remarkable woman."



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