



Dr. Maria Runfola with infant student

How many people do you know who (1) were raised on Trenton Avenue near Maryland Street deep in the heart of Buffalo's West Side; (2) had her first piano recital at age five; (3) played with the Buffalo Philharmonic at age nine; (4) was the president of the first graduating class of Holy Cross School; (5) attended Villa Maria High Academy where she portrayed Jesus Christ in the Easter Pageant Play and

delivered her lines in Polish! and (6) is a published author, a much in demand speaker, an internationally renowned teacher and authority on how and when children develop music aptitude? I know one, and I believe she is unique - Dr. Maria Runfola, Associate Professor and Music Program Director at the University at Buffalo. Dr. Runfola attended Nazereth College, the Eastman School of Music, and the University at Buffalo where she received her PhD in music education. Her work in developing appropriate music activities for pre-k students is universally lauded. Yet, for all her success, Dr. Runfola remains the smart, self-effacing and hardworking person I met in 1950 when we were fourth-graders together at Holy Cross School.

Maria was one of the favorites of the Felician nuns who taught there. She was respected for her brains and diligence, but even more importantly, for her musical talent, a talent so valued by the Felicians. Maria won a scholarship to Villa Maria Academy and was the first of a number of Holy Cross students who would make the trek to Buffalo's East Side to attend Villa Maria. She has devoted her life to music education, with a particular interest in early childhood arts education and the child singing voice.

Now she is repaying her debt to those sisters with whom she bonded so many years ago by helping to establish a collaborative project between the University at Buffalo and Villa Maria College, which employs the methods and theories advocated by Dr. Runfola. The program reaches out to very young children (as young as three weeks!) to introduce them to music and to lay the groundwork for lifelong participation in mu-

sic.

I had not spoken to Dr. Runfola in nearly 60 years, from the time we graduated from Holy Cross in 1954, until very recently. I was searching for a music program that might be appropriate for my then 17-month old grandson (Salvatore, by the way) and now, I'm looking forward to my new born granddaughter, Juliana, being introduced to music as well. I had purchased my grandson a number of CDs and instructed his parents to play them whenever he was going to sleep: Beethoven, Bach and Mozart. I guess I was hoping that it might somehow foster his love and appreciation of music, even if he developed no particular talent for performing. Recently, I heard his parents singing the ABC song with him, and, to my amazement, he could carry a tune and imitate the sounds he heard. He has become very interested in a toy that plays the ABC song and that excited me.

As I went about my search, I found a music program offered at Villa Maria College in conjunction with UB that catered to very young children. I investigated, and lo and behold, Maria Runfola is an integral part of that program. I recollected that Maria was always extremely musically inclined and decided to Google her to ask her about the program. It was amazing. Even though we have not seen or spoken to one

another for so many years, we laughed as we recalled former classmates and recounted stories of our classroom days. What would people think - 54 students in one classroom? Somehow we learned and learned well, thanks to the efforts of a remarkable Felician Sister Mary Redempta, who was our teacher for five years, from 4th through 8th grade. After our conversation ended, I knew Maria's story must be shared



Maria Runfola, 4 years old, studying piano

She is a role model and an inspiration, a great teacher and administrator who is doing so much to help in the total education of our children. We are blessed to have Dr. Maria Runfola living and working in Buffalo, New York.

*Editor's Note: You may be interested in Dr. Runfola's newest book: TIPS The Child Voice 2nd Edition published by Rowman and Littlefield. It can be purchased from Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, MENC: The National Association for Music Education and many other vendors.*