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## Clarence & Richard Adler

Richard Adler's lengthy daily swim is one of his Lake Placid pleasures. Though his career is based in New York City, the eighty-two-year-old's musical and emotional roots are strongest here.

The co-composer of Tony Award-winning musicals *Damn Yankees* and *The Pajama Game* spends a month each summer with his wife, Susan, in a rented home on the shore of Lake Placid. Richard's Adirondack memories date back more than seventy-five years. His father, concert pianist and master piano teacher Clarence Adler, bought a home three miles outside the village of Lake Placid in October 1923, providing his family and his future music students with a summer retreat in the mountains.

Almost at the end of then unpaved Averyville Road, the 110-acre farm became a music camp. The barn—christened the “barnatorium” became a concert hall, and several outbuildings were converted to practice cottages for piano students.

The Adlers named the place *Ka-ren-i-o-ke*, which in Iroquois translates as “place of the beautiful song.” Later, it was shortened to Karinoke.

Every June, Sheldon “Shel” Otis of Lake Placid would drive his moving van down Route 9 to the Adler family's apartment on Central Park West, in Manhattan, and return laden with their personal possessions and several pianos. He reversed the trip in late September.

Clarence's pupils in the early years included rising stars such as composers Aaron Copland and Richard Rodgers, conductor Walter Hendl and numerous others. For a teacher to truly help a student Clarence believed there had to be a “bond of sympathy between them.” At Karinoke he connected with many young artists and brought joy to local audiences for four decades.

Richard remembers Sunday afternoons at Karinoke as dozens of cars—in the early days Pierce Arrows, Rolls Royces, Dusenbergs, Reos and Austins—drove up the dusty road to attend recitals. “The concerts were magnificent,” he says. “They were held in the barnatorium. Mother collected fragrant balsam boughs, decorated the beams and lighted candles in tall, wrought-iron candelabras to frame the artists on stage. The audience often filled the place to capacity, requiring that the huge doors be thrown open to accommodate the overflow crowd, which sat on the hillside.”

Music first came to Clarence Adler in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he was born. It was the mid-1890s. From age seven to twelve, Clarence, the son of a German immigrant streetcar conductor, delivered newspapers at 5:30 each morning to supplement the family income.

One day, while exploring beyond the bounds of his route, Clarence heard beautiful music soaring out of a second-story window. He entered the apartment house, climbed the stairs, followed the sound to a partially open door and silently stepped inside. A large athletic-looking man was seated at a piano playing what Clarence later learned was a Beethoven sonata. Fascinated by this music, the sound of which he had never before experienced, Clarence stood spellbound.

The man stopped, turned and stared at Clarence. He was in trouble. He was trespassing. The man rose. Clarence feared the worst. Instead the man asked in a reassuring tone, "Did you like the music?" All Clarence could do was nod.

The pianist was Romeo Gorno, a professor at the Cincinnati College of Music. Gorno picked up young Clarence, placed him on his shoulders, then seated him at the piano. From that moment a great friendship began, and a new talent was discovered. Under Gorno's tutelage, Clarence toured the South and Midwest performing for dozens of audiences by the time he was twelve.

Gorno was instrumental in getting his young pupil a scholarship to study music at the college. At age eighteen, Clarence wanted more-advanced training. He went to Europe, where he studied in Berlin with the famous Russian pianist Leopold Godowsky. Clarence later praised him as one of the greatest musicians he had ever met. Then he toured Europe for several years. In 1913 Clarence, age twenty-seven, returned to the United States and settled in New York City, where he performed with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Willem Mengelberg and the New York Symphony under Walter Damrosch. In 1919 Adler was one of the founders of the New York Trio.

At a dinner party, Clarence sat across from Elsa Adrienne Richard, a debutante from Mobile, Alabama. Some six years his junior, she was finishing her musical education. He persuaded her to turn pages for him during some of his performances. Love grew. After a courtship spanning four years, the couple married. Their first child, Jane, died at age three. In 1921 their only other child, Richard, was born.

In the summer of 1924, with toddler Richard, the Adler family came to Lake Placid. Clarence's piano students soon followed. Most of them traveled by train and remained for several weeks, benefiting from the beauty of the mountain scenery, a respite from the city's heat and, more important, the expertise of their teacher. Sunday concerts provided them with an opportunity to showcase improved technique, original compositions and growing talent.

Besides teaching, Clarence Adler enjoyed an occasional round of golf or visits from friends, who would add spice to a summer evening, playing instruments or a good game of poker.

Louise Morin, one of Shel Otis's daughters, took a weekly horseback ride from the village to Karinoke to study piano with Adler or one of his students. Evelyn Shine and her late husband, whose summer home is now on property purchased from the Adlers, were also pupils there.

At Karinoke Richard was required to take piano lessons, in which he then showed little interest. As he grew older, he was also required to do chores. His most important job was to rise early and hike a mile and a quarter to the pump house to start springwater running through a series of pipes to the camp.

When Richard was a teenager, his parents, as the law required, sent him to Lake Placid High School each September before they returned to the city. He became acquainted with a few of the local lads. Several remain in touch.

“I’ve known [Roland] Bob Urfirer [today a local attorney] since I was ten years old,” Richard says. “And Nathan Farb, then the local rabbi’s stepson and today a renowned photographer living nearby, is another longtime friend.”

Once out of high school, Richard headed to the University of North Carolina to study dramatic arts and only occasionally returned for summer visits. After graduating and serving as an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve during World War II, his musical background began to assert itself. He became more and more involved in the world of theater. Richard’s association with Lake Placid was temporarily cut off when his father died in 1969 and Karinoke was sold. The camp is now a private home.

In the 1960s Richard earned best-score and best-musical Tonys as co-composer with Jerry Ross of *Damn Yankees* and *The Pajama Game*. Recordings of hit songs, including “You Gotta Have Heart,” “Steam Heat,” “Whatever Lola Wants (Lola Gets),” “Hernando’s Hideaway” and “Hey There,” have sold more than thirty million copies.

Richard has remained involved in all kinds of music, creating musicals and commercials for television, composing scores for the Chicago City Ballet and the Dallas Symphony. In 1983 he wrote *Wilderness Suite* under commission from the Department of the Interior. The score was one of his four Pulitzer Prize–nominated efforts. In 2000 dancer Rebecca Kelly, a summer artist-in-residence at the Lake Placid Center for the Arts, choreographed a ballet to accompany it. The piece is still in the repertoire of the Lake Placid Sinfonietta, the community’s summer orchestra since 1917.

In 1986 Richard was invited to participate in the Lake Placid Festival of the Arts, to be held two years later. The Sinfonietta was to play several other works he composed. Also, “I agreed to do a two-hour ‘Evening with Adler’ at the Lake Placid Center for the Arts,” he recalls.

But in June 1987 he was diagnosed with throat cancer. With radiation and, Richard believes, a deepening spirituality, he beat the disease. Treatment ended in July 1988. Less than six weeks later, he kept his promise and gave a two-hour singing and storytelling performance.

In the early 1990s Richard returned to Lake Placid with Susan and began an annual summer vacation ritual. He joined the advisory board of the new Lake Placid Institute for the Arts and Humanities, a nonprofit organization that fosters cultural activities. Richard suggested the group invite the New Dramatists, a New York City–based program for gifted young playwrights, so the writers could focus on their work in a quiet setting. Some of the plays conceived, written and improved in Lake Placid have been performed off Broadway.

The octogenarian has no intention of retiring. Within the year, he expects to see *The Pajama Game* return to Broadway with three new songs he composed. Several musical works for children are also under way.

“Richard possesses great spiritual and creative energy,” says James Winn, president of the Lake Placid Institute. “He believes in some spiritual continuity with what his father did in presenting high-quality, classic music.”