

The New York Times

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, JULY 25, 2002

The Arts

The New York Times



Photographs by Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

Students in the Perlman Music Program are encouraged to play as well as work. Here they relax around a laptop.

A Musical Dream Come True

Thou Shalt Learn to Play Without Being Tortured

By **LOIS B. MORRIS**
and **ROBERT LIPSYTE**

SHELTER ISLAND, N.Y., July 24 — Nobody skips Video Night. Campers sprawl on the floor of the boys' dormitory, counselors and teachers straddle chairs, as their heroes perform on the big-screen television. They applaud and cheer as if

NOTES FROM MUSIC CAMP

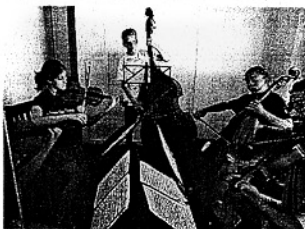
*Practicing to Be Normal,
Even When Life Isn't*

Glenn Gould, Jascha Heifetz and Vladimir Horowitz were in the room.

Itzhak Perlman, the V.J., calls for comments. When a 13-year-old mentions technique, Mr. Perlman says: "Never mind technique. They had fantastic control of rhythm."

A sharp voice chimes in. "I'm thinking about them as personalities."

Mr. Perlman warms to the subject: "We're talking about three great people who were off the wall."



Patrick Romano directs the choir, top. Above, Michelle Ross, Chris Maxwell and Justina Sullivan in a Dvorak piece.

Now Toby Perlman, his wife, solos on her favorite theme. "It was because of how early they started to perform in public," she says. She accents her phrases, varies her pitch. "They had no chance to grow. They had no chance to know who they were. None of them knew how to get along with people. Horowitz was ding-dong. His conversation was like a 7-year-old's. You want to aim to be normal, because what you do is not normal."

What they do, in summer on an island off the Hamptons, is practice their instruments alone four hours a day, take private lessons and group classes, play in chamber groups and an orchestra and sing in chorus. Then they talk about music and maybe rehearse a bit more before bedtime. Many nights they perform free in a tent in front of large audiences, where mosquitoes bite and babies cry.

How they do all this in the rarefied bubble of the Perlman Music Program has come to be known as Toby's dream, which, before it was even her e-mail address, was as simple as a commandment: Thou shalt learn to play music without being tortured.

In Toby's dream all gifted young musi-

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