

With her elegant fingers flying over the ivory keys, 24-year-old pianist Tara Kamangar had the room captivated with her recital of Loris Tjeknavorian's *Fantastic Dances*. I grabbed the beautiful young American-Iranian for a chat.

Tell us a little about your background

I was born in the San Francisco Bay Area and grew up in California. My parents were born in Iran but moved to the US in the late 1970s. At 18 I moved to Boston to study anthropology at Harvard, and at age 22 I moved to London to study piano performance at the Royal Academy of Music. I like London because it is very cosmopolitan with an exciting music scene. Every day one can go to wonderful concerts of all genres.

How did you start playing the piano?

I started playing at the age of three. I have two older brothers who were taking piano and violin lessons at the time. I always wanted to do whatever they were doing, so I begged my parents for lessons as well! I began private lessons in piano and violin at the ages of three and four, respectively. My first performance was at the age of six in Merced, California - I played a Haydn Piano Sonata for 150 people.

What does it take to be a pianist?

It helps to start early. Although it sounds very young, three or four is actually an ideal age to start lessons. It is extremely important to have

a knowledgeable and caring teacher - otherwise you will pick up many bad habits. Patience and love of music are also necessary.

You were the president of the Piano Society at Harvard. What was that like?

Playing the piano can be pretty lonely. String, wind, and bass players often play in quartets, bands, and orchestras, but pianists usually practice and perform by themselves so the Piano Society was a great way for the pianists to meet and socialise. We had over 300 members. There are so many classical pianists at Harvard who play at a very high level but decide not to pursue music professionally. It's very difficult to make a living as a classical musician.

What about your general Harvard experience?

My general Harvard experience was positive. I majored in social anthropology with a focus on music of the Middle East. I was grateful for the chance to learn about other cultures and their music, and I also learned so much from the international students. However, the Boston winters are extremely cold and dark and I grew up with constant sunshine in California. I don't think I could survive another Boston winter! Also, it took me a long time to get accustomed to the campus and college life. I enjoyed it the most during my final year there.

What has been the best reaction to your playing?

It was when I played for music producer David Foster a couple of months ago in Malibu,

California. He asked me to perform at a fundraiser at the home of Barbra Streisand the same night.

What was playing at Barbra's Streisand's house like?

It was a wonderful experience. I performed after saxophonist Kenny G and before singers Melissa Etheridge and Josh Groban, in Barbra Streisand's tented garden in Malibu. It was surreal to meet so many celebrities. At the dinner I was sitting with Dick Van Dyke and after the performance I met Barbra, actresses Eva Longoria and Amy Brenneman, and several members of the Democratic party. Everyone was friendly and it was a lot of fun. The US Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, paraphrased a beautiful quote by John Adams during her speech: "I must study politics and war, so my children have the liberty to study agriculture, architecture, and commerce, so that their children can study painting, poetry, music..."

What do you have planned for the future?

In the immediate future, I will be playing several concerts across the globe. In the long term, I hope to focus more on songwriting, which I currently work on with my brother Arya, who is the best poet and lyricist. My music is influenced by popular French songs of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, Middle Eastern music and Latin rhythms - tango and salsa. I would also like to record the piano works of Iranian composers such as Aminollah Hossein and Loris Tjeknavorian to a major CD label with wide distribution.

Do you have a final message for our readers?

Listen to music every day, it makes life much more enjoyable!

With that, my session with Tara is over. Some may say that classical piano isn't their "thing" but Tara is capable of converting you. It is not just the music she plays but the way in which she plays it. She puts her entire being into her music which makes you want to *watch* her as well as listen. I hope her star shines for many years to come.

After a fantastic evening, I head home, fully sated by the glitz and glamour, and a sense of pride for being a part of such a productive and varied community 🎹

Visit www.tarakamangar.com to learn more about Tara and upcoming shows.



The pianist plays to an enraptured audience at the AWAs

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