

Musician follows in mentor's footsteps

By Diane Welch
UNION-TRIBUNE

CARMEL VALLEY – Life was very different for Carmel Valley resident Svetlana Pikous when she was a child growing up in Chelyabinsk, Russia.

February 11, 2005

She split her days between school, music and ice skating. Then, at age 9, she began playing piano, taught by world-renowned Russian musician Rebecca Gitlim.

That led Pikous to a career as a piano teacher.

"Rebecca watched my piano performance during a concert on Pioneer's Day. She saw my talent and said that she wanted me to be her student," Pikous said.

In a departure from tradition, Gitlim encouraged Pikous to play jazz as well as classical music.

Pikous practiced up to eight hours a day and traveled throughout Russia, competing and performing with her mentor by her side.



"She was an unbelievable musician and respected throughout the world," Pikous said.

After nine years of partnership, Gitlim died of cancer and Pikous could not find a teacher to replace her. At age 25, she left Russia and came to the United States to start a new life.

Now Pikous has students of her own, and she is following in the footsteps of her mentor.

"I love my students and I want them to love music," said Pikous, 36. "Everyone of them is a little star, but they have to work hard to succeed."

Twelve-year-old Chase Morrin is one of her rising stars. He began lessons with "Lana," as he calls her, two years ago, but broke his arm and was unable to play for six months.

Despite the interruption, Chase recently was named Musician of the Year by the Carmel Valley branch of the Boy's & Girl's Club.

"When he came to me, he said that he wanted to be a composer, like Andrew Lloyd Webber," Pikous said.

She told him, "OK, you are gifted, but it is not enough. This is only half of the picture. The other half is hard work."

Pikous teaches improvisational jazz technique and composition, as well as classical music.

"Sometimes my demands are high and it is a struggle," she said, but the results overshadow the conflict.

"Music is now Chase's passion," said his mother, Cindy Morrin. "Lana means so much to him. They are a team."

Pikous has high hopes for Chase and doesn't doubt his abilities to reach his goals.

"He can be like Billy Joel or Elton John, but I want him to be Chase Morrin. He is unique," she said.

Currently Pikous has 30 students. Twice a year they perform at Greene Music on Miramar Road. Tickets are \$15, and proceeds are shared by the performers.

"They are like professional musicians, getting paid for their talents," Pikous said.