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a magazine of arts & activism
Organica

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COVER: *New York City*, photograph by Jacek Gancarz. For more of Gancarz's images, see the Gallery on pg. 17.

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Making Waves

Jennifer Argenti's dual careers as award-winning surfer and violinist are a unique mix

By Rhonda J. Nelson

RANDY WRIGHT

ROBIN PERINE

Jennifer Argenti's newest recording is *Sun Moon Lake*, a collaboration with rockabilly guitar legend Danny B. Harvey. She has just qualified for the 2011 Western Surfing Association's Hobie Championship, a title she won in 2007. Aubrey Organics® is one of Argenti's surfing sponsors.

Most small children imagine their adulthoods free of boundaries. Ask a child what she wants to be when she grows up, and often the answer combines very dissimilar career choices... *I want to be an astronaut AND a ballerina*... a cute, often repeated scenario that always garners laughter.

One meets grown-up, award-winning violinist *and* championship surfer Jennifer Argenti, and realizes that sometimes childhood fantasies do become realities. Argenti, who was named Instrumental Artist of the Year at the 2009 Los Angeles Music Awards, also won the title of Women's Shortboard West Coast Champion at the 2007 Western Surfing Association's (WSA) Hobie Championship. She has just released her third album, *Sun Moon Lake*, and has recently qualified for the 2011 WSA Championship.

The path to make a dream an actuality usually involves much preparation, and Argenti started early. The youngest of four girls in a family where everyone played music, she began her training on the piano at age six, adding the violin one year later. As a teen she attended the Baltimore School for the Arts, and was a member of the Greater Baltimore Youth Orchestra. Upon graduation, she attended the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory of Music in Cleveland, Ohio.

However, in spite of years of classical training, Argenti felt something was missing from her music. She decided to try improvisation, and enrolled in some Marc O'Connor fiddle camps. The fiddle camps led to further study in contemporary improvisation at the California College of Music, as well as jazz improvisation at the highly respected Colburn School of Music. "I now know that all that time what was missing from my music was *me*," Argenti said.

Sun Moon Lake, her latest album, is a second improvisational project with rockabilly guitar legend Danny B. Harvey, with whom she also recorded *Endless Summertime* in 2009. *Sun Moon Lake* draws its inspiration from Argenti's favorite lake in Taiwan, a country she first visited at age 15 with the Baltimore Symphony Youth Orchestra. From her first visit she felt an immediate connection to the people, the culture, the land and the language.

For a period of time in her 20s, Argenti lived in Taiwan and "adopted" a Chinese father, Liu Bebe. They have maintained a close relationship for over 20 years. "Liu Bebe is now an elderly man, and every time I go visit him in the mountainside outside of Taipei, I see my picture in a frame on his desk alongside his closest family members. It is quite an honor." *Sun Moon Lake* is Argenti's tribute to Liu Bebe and to the country she considers a second home.

When she moved back to the states from Taiwan, Argenti relocated to California. An avid runner along Santa Monica Beach, she admired the grace and elegance of the surfers so much that she decided to try surfing. After 12 years of experience, dedication and training, Argenti decided she was ready to compete.

"I started competing at 40, and my first year I won the Championship. I continued surfing, but took a break from competing. But this year it just felt like the right thing to do again. My divisions are Shortboard 18 & Over and Shortboard Open Women, which means I'm competing against girls less than half my age," she said.

Argenti feels that competing with younger women helps to hone her skills. They have grown up in a different era and skill level of surfing than she has, and she is both energized and invigorated surfing next to them. She considers her endurance level equal to that of her younger competitors. Because of the vegan lifestyle Argenti adopted almost 16 years ago, she feels stronger than she did in her 20s. "Being vegan is the core of my lifestyle. It's as important to me as surfing and playing the violin. I believe if it wasn't for my vegan lifestyle, I wouldn't be able to physically endure the amount of performing and surfing that I do on a regular basis," Argenti said.

She also feels the challenges she faces in her musical career, such as learning new tunes, performing without rehearsal, or walking on stage to greet a sold out audience, enable her to translate the same risk-taking attitude to make her a stronger surfer. "From training in all kinds of elements, to surfing bigger waves, to competing against girls half my age, all of that, I believe, keeps me mentally and physically young," Argenti said.

Having a dual career benefits her in ways that focusing on only one of the two vocations would not. She claims that spending time in turbulent water clears her head and loosens her body, which makes her a better violinist. Conversely, surfing relieves her of the intense physical strains from playing the violin. Argenti also acknowledges adrenaline surges, which can benefit both surfers and musicians. "I feel adrenaline in bigger surf and also before a big performance. I think it's a sign that I am challenging and pushing myself outside of my comfort zone, which I feel is a good thing."

Most successful people attribute inspiration to friends or family members. Argenti recalls the support of her mother, who died two years ago, and who instilled in her the mindset that she could accomplish anything. "Every phone call ended with how proud she was of me."

But Argenti has a lot of other people who believe in her. Her corporate supporters include: Ultimate Ears (monitors), barcus-berry (violins), Fantapper (fan tracking software), Sak-up (surf clothing), W.R.O.N.G. (surf clothing) and Crush Sunglasses, as well as Aubrey Organics. "Aubrey Organics is so important to me. I believe in their products and their ethics—vegan/no animal testing. Very important," Argenti said.

As an onlooker to the double career of Jennifer Argenti, one might imagine a myriad of challenges she's dealt with in order to generate success in two chosen vocations. She admits only to one: her hair.

"When I surf, my hair is always wet and salty, needing to be brushed, whereas when I perform it needs to be manageable and presentable. It's a whole ordeal. I have to plan it all out beforehand. If it's a surfing day, but also a performance night, I have to make sure to factor in my hair after surfing. If it's just a few days of surfing, I can let my hair go salty for days," Argenti said.

Follow Jennifer at: www.JenniferArgenti.com

Rhonda J. Nelson's poetry collection, *Musical Chair*, is available from Anhinga Press. Her poetry CD, *Kahlo*, based on the work of Mexican surrealist painter Frida Kahlo, is a collaboration with the Tampa-based improvisational band, Irritable Tribe of Poets.