



Olga Planting the Tree of the Church
Icon painted in 1946 by A. Arapoff



Mary Arapoff

Russian heritage motivates guest for a spiritual connection through icon

Mary Arapoff McEwen, known professionally by her family name of Arapoff, graduated from Emmanuel College in Boston and began an illustrious career as a lyric soprano. Her vocal education – which has continued over the years since her college days – includes training by distinguished American and Italian coaches, vocal repertoire master classes, drama and opera master classes. She has performed operatic roles in *Rigoletto* and *Die Fledermaus*, in addition to others, and has sung some of the greatest oratorio repertoire. Her sacred programs are in unique worship experience combining the music of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Vivaldi and others with folk music, Gregorian Chant, audience participation and dramatic interpretation with icon and sacred music.

Explaining the icons...

By Mary Arapoff
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What is an icon? – it is a religious image typically painted on a small wooden panel and used in the devotions of Eastern Christians. Medieval icons in Russia were done from the 12th to the 15th centuries. These are the most authentic in the true icon style, uncluttered and deeply spiritual. They were unsigned, done for the glory of God. They witness to the presence of God as clearly as the Word of God in Sacred Scripture.

My father's work continued in this tradition. His icon works consist of three different parts:

1. ancient icon style and themes
2. ancient icon styles with entirely new themes (for example, the beautiful icon, Olga) or with old themes done in a new original way (Abraham and the three angels). Andrei Rubles did the most famous one in 1311.
3. entirely modern icons with new themes; basic ancient icon style with added elements of 20th century artistic styles impressionism, expressionism, abstraction done with brilliant colors and deep religious feeling.

In this last category, a new chapter emerged in Russian icon painting. It is a synthesis of the ancient tradition with Arapoff's creativity.

Icons, to express most beautifully the spirituality of the subject matter, should only be done *in egg tempera paint on wood prepared with gesso*. This is important to mention because so many icons now are being done in acrylic, oil, etc. Thus the luminous beauty is lost which should be especially noticeable in the eyes wherein is expressed the soul. This should be a gentle, penetrating look, not a scary, bug-eyed look.

The Olga icon is 22" x 16". Arapoff did 52 studies in tempera and gilt on

The Olga icon is 22" x 16". Arapoff did 52 studies in tempera and gilt on paper and 100 pencil sketches to arrive at this entirely new icon. Olga, wife of Igor, prince of Kiev, was baptized a Christian in 957 a.d. She helped rule the earliest princely city, Kiev, and was the grandmother of St. Vladimir who effected the Christianization of the Russian people in 988 a.d. The icon represents three angels pouring waters of baptism on the Tree of Faith. In the branches, Sergius of Radonez bows before Mary and Saints Peter and John. St. Sergius had this very dream requesting that he found the Trinity Monastery at Zagorsk which to this day is the oldest, most famous monastery. It is located in the countryside near Moscow.

The Abraham icon is larger, 25" x 30" and represents the Old Testament Trinity, the Three Angels. My father chose the most dramatic moment when the angels first appeared and Abraham kneels in reverence and awe. The table is set in the tent to the right in welcome.



Abraham and the Three Angels
Icon painted in 1941 by A.

Her major concert appearances include a tribute to Leonard Bernstein, *Broadway and Beyond*, a one-woman show, which Mary wrote and produced. She has toured nationally and internationally, appeared on stage, radio and television, and sung concert tours in this country and in Italy (Rome, Umbria, Tuscany). Mary has also had the opportunity to present premiere performances of a number of works. She is the founder! director of "Lyric Strings," a chamber music ensemble for voice and instruments and teaches a select group of piano students.

But despite all of this music permeating her life, Mary has been led to a far different, spiritually enriching study. As the daughter of Alexis Paul Arapoff, a renowned artist and Russian nobleman (her father's mother was Catherine Tolstoy), Mary has immersed herself in her Russian heritage, its history, art, music, costumes and poetry. She has presented numerous performances on the "Magic of Russia" for Boston inner-city schoolchildren, under the auspices of the Russian American Music Association, and for the New Hampshire Arts Council, in conjunction with the Siberian Children's Art Exhibit. She conducts the Russian music ensemble at Boston College.

Mary's first love is the art and history, which was her father's lifework, the painting of icons. Alexis Arapoff died suddenly when Mary was 11 years old. His influence on her life was enormous and his painting has created a special focus in her performances. In her lectures on the beauty of Russian icons, ancient and modern, she tells the story of these spiritually significant artworks and explains her father's importance in the development of new themes. When possible (within a two-hour driving distance), she brings actual icons to a 'hands-on' program allowing the audience to have direct contact with the sacred objects. Otherwise, she uses slides to illustrate the lecture. This summer, she will begin presentation of a multimedia program using music and art together.

For information about Mary's Russian programs, write to
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Mary is married to engineer James McEwen, whom she met while a student at Emmanuel. She admits that the engineer ~'s the artistic temperaments make for an interesting life together. They' had five children .all of whom Mary taught to play the piano!



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