



WEEKEND: Lera Auerbach back in Aspen B5

Poll shows wide support for schools tax

Andre Salvail
The Aspen Times

An Aspen Education Foundation poll conducted in late June shows widespread local support for a sales tax increase to fund

the Aspen School District, foundation President Robin Hamill said Thursday.

The scientific poll, which had a margin of error of about 5 percent, sought to gauge support among city and county voters. At

the city level, 59.3 percent of the 167 respondents indicated that they would support a 0.35 percent sales tax increase on Aspen sales to help the public school system. At the county level, 57.8 percent of 380 respondents indi-

cated that they would support a 0.25 percent sales tax increase on Pitkin County sales to assist the district.

"We are very gratified by these poll results because they demonstrate the community's strong

support for our children's education in the district — support which crosses age, gender and political lines and comes from both those who have students in

SCHOOLS A6

1 million miles by bus

RFTA vehicle goes the distance

Scott Condon
The Aspen Times

Think your vehicle has a lot of miles? A bus hauling passengers up and down the Roaring Fork Valley for the past 14 years recently topped 1 million.

The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority has 105 buses in its fleet, including 24 workhorses built by Neoplan 12 to 14 years ago. Those Neoplans are among the best ever built, said Kenny Osier, RFTA director of maintenance and they are far exceeding their life expectancy of 12 years or 500,000 miles. It was a Neoplan that topped 1 million miles last month.

"It's the first Neoplan that's hit a million miles, but there are several that are close," Osier said. He estimated 20 others have logged

800,000 to 900,000 miles.

Other buses in the RFTA fleet probably have topped 1 million miles, Osier said. The Neoplan happens to be the most recent one.

Osier said it's a combination of drivers, mechanics and the bus manufacturer that have kept the Neoplans on the road so long. The buses were built by a Lamar company that is no longer in business.

The buses put on 40,000 to 60,000 miles per year. They go through service every 5,000 miles and an oil change every 10,000. It's getting more and more difficult to find replacement parts for them, so they likely don't have much longer in the fleet, Osier said.

"It's like any car — eventually you have to say, 'OK, it's time,'" he said.

RFTA has 22 buses on order that will run on compressed natural gas. They are being built by Gillig, a company owned by the Crown family of Chicago, which also owns Aspen Skiing Co.

READY, AIM ...



Janet Urquhart The Aspen Times

Boys armed with slingshots found something more interesting than the scenery at Maroon Lake on Friday morning — trying to fire pebbles across the water to the far shore.

Basalt fire district plans to seek tax increase in November

Scott Condon
The Aspen Times

The Basalt Fire Department plans to ask voters to approve a property tax increase in November to make up for the loss of revenues caused by the recession and slow recovery.

"We're not asking for more money than we ever had. We're asking to replace the money we

lost because our assessed values have gone down," said Fire Chief Scott Thompson.

The assessed values of residential property took a dive of anywhere from 25 to 45 percent in the mid-Roaring Fork Valley during the recession. Because of the delay in revaluations by the state government, taxing districts didn't start feeling the pinch of reduced property taxes until last year.

The Basalt and Rural Fire Protection District's revenues from property taxes fell about 37 percent, said Bob Guion, president of the board of directors.

"We think that will continue to go down," he said.

Real estate experts have told the fire district to expect the assessed value to drop another 20 to 30 percent at the next revaluation, which will affect property tax collections

for 2014 and 2015.

The Fire Department, like most special taxing districts, is almost entirely dependent on property taxes. It charges fees for transporting medical patients in ambulances.

Guion said the district needs to increase revenues or consider dropping services. It can't make do with current revenues and offer the same level of service, he said.

While revenues are falling, calls for service are increasing. There were 20 percent more calls in 2011, and another double-digit increase appears likely for this year, Thompson said.

To get out of the quandary, the fire district's five-member board of directors recently voted unanimously to pursue the tax hike,

BASALT A5

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weekend



Nora Feller, Courtesy photo

Pianist Lera Auerbach: Growing musical roots in the U.S.

VISUAL ARTS Clay Center goes Cajun B7 • **WHAT'S HAPPENING** B2 • **MOVIES** The "Ice Age" cometh, again B12

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Pianist Lera Auerbach will perform a recital, featuring her composition "24 Preludes," on Saturday at Harris Hall.

Eli Akerstein Courtesy photo

Life and death in the concert hall

Russian-born pianist Lera Auerbach returns to Aspen

Stewart Oksenhorn
The Aspen Times

Lera Auerbach says she is the type of person who "carries her world with her." So Auerbach still feels the gravitas that accompanied music-making — all facets of life, really — in her native Soviet Union, even though she has lived more than half her 38 years in the relative freedom and lightness of the United States.

"A premiere, say, by Schnittke wasn't just a premiere. There was a sense of life-and-death intensity; it was an event of incredible significance," Auerbach, a pianist and composer, as well as a poet and visual artist, said of concerts in the former Soviet Union. "I think every concert should be like that — it's about being transformed. If we're not transformed, we've just wasted two hours. For an artist, it's important never to lose the life-and-death intensity."

While intensity was in great supply, there was another necessary ingredient that Auerbach couldn't find in Chelyabinsk, the industrial Russian city 600 miles east of Moscow where she was born. For her music, she needed freedom — freedom to interact with other artists, freedom to experiment with all kinds of sounds.

"As an artist, I needed that climate, to explore," said Auerbach, who has lived in the States since the age of 17. "At that age I'd already explored the best of what Russia had to offer, but I was hungry to see what else there was."

So hungry that Auerbach was willing to take a breathtaking gamble with her life. In 1991, Auerbach, who had entered a school for gifted musicians when she was

'I felt like I was discovering this exotic place, Aspen. You'd see students practicing in nature, these wonderful creeks. It felt like a fairy tale, like one of my childhood dreams.'

Lera Auerbach, pianist

4, was selected to participate in a cultural exchange program. The musicians in her group numbered just two, her and a violinist from Germany, but the retinue comprised several Russian businessmen — that is, KGB agents — whose job it was to make sure that Auerbach didn't experience too much American-style freedom. The first stop was in Denver, where Auerbach performed at a convention of clock-and watch-makers. After the concert, Auerbach was approached by someone who offered to take her to a wonderful music festival that was close by. The next day, an open day on her schedule, she found herself making the four-hour drive, in a foreign country, with strangers, into the mountains, to see the Aspen Music Festival.

Auerbach was taken straight to the Aspen Music School campus, a short way up the Castle Creek Valley. She didn't see any performances, though she did witness a master class in composition and saw a handful of students with their instruments on the wooded campus, which was fasci-

nating enough.

"To me, this was incredible," she said. "I felt like I was discovering this exotic place, Aspen. You'd see students practicing in nature, these wonderful creeks. It felt like a fairy tale, like one of my childhood dreams. It was a first step on my crucial line."

After Colorado, Auerbach and her group made their way to New York City. Auerbach had the phone number of the one person in the States her mother knew — Ilya Lehman, a violin teacher whom Auerbach's mother was slightly acquainted with from decades earlier. Auerbach called Lehman, who wanted to hear her play some music. Lehman called in a friend, a conductor, who was impressed enough to put in a call to the Manhattan School of Music. The date was July 3, but miraculously the president of the school was able to quickly arrange an audition. Auerbach played one of her own pieces, Prokofiev sonatas, Liszt etudes, and some Beethoven. On the spot, she was invited to enter as a student come September.

Auerbach's handlers were already nervous; in Denver, Auerbach had been talking to some immigrants from Eastern Europe and had shown a liking for freedom.

"I was 17, not wanting to be told who I could talk to," she recalled. "I said, 'This is America. You cannot tell me not to talk to people!'"

In New York, she fully exercised her freedom: When no one was looking, she went to her hotel, took her things to Lehman's and called her parents.

"I asked them, 'Do I return home to Russia, or do I stay here?'" she said. "They said, 'This is a decision that will change your life — it must be your decision! They gave me their blessing, whatever I wanted to do.'"

Auerbach had much to weigh. If she returned to Russia, she didn't know if she would be permitted to leave again, ever. (The collapse of the Soviet Union was still six months away.) If she stayed, she had no idea how she would pay for school, how she would live on her own or whether her parents would suffer for her defection. Eventually she called the Soviet agents and told them she would not be joining them on the flight back to Russia.

"They said they would call all the KGB in New York, handcuff me and put me in prison in Russia," she said.

The date of her scheduled return trip was the Fourth of July — "My personal independence day," said Auerbach, who performs a recital on Saturday at Harris Hall with a program that includes her own 1999 piece, "24 Preludes," and Musorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition."

AUERBACH B6



Nora Feller Courtesy photo

Lera Auerbach on composing music at age 4: "I just felt it was the most natural thing to do. I thought everyone does it."

AUERBACH FROM B5

The people on the maternal side of Auerbach's family are all musicians; her mother was the piano teacher at a local college. On her father's side, they were all writers; her father, though a professor of engineering, wrote poetry on the side. Auerbach learned to write words and music at the same time and composed her first piece at age 4.

"It was a pretty similar experience to write a sentence or a musical sentence," she said. "I just felt it was the most natural thing to do. I thought everyone does it."

Stories and music were fully intertwined. When Auerbach went to the piano, what came out was a combination of sound and story. One of her early piano pieces was a translation of a poem her mother read to her, about a sailboat, the ocean and a terrible storm. Auerbach played arpeggios from one end of the keyboard to the other that represented the sea.

"Whatever my parents read to me at night, I would improvise. It was a little bit like painting with music," she said.

Coming from Chelyabinsk, rather than a more cosmopolitan Russian city, Auerbach didn't dream much of places like New York. She arrived with an almost total innocence.

"From Chelyabinsk to America — it was like coming to the moon," she said.

Her only New York touchstone was Carnegie Hall, and she clearly didn't know much about how the venue operated: On her first day in New York, when Ilya Lehman asked her what she would like to do, she said she wanted to play at Carnegie Hall, explaining that she had a free evening.

Auerbach's creativity continued to flow in an almost childlike way as she absorbed most every influence around her.

"The main impulse was the sense of freedom that everyone talks about," said Auerbach, who transferred to Juilliard to study piano and composition after a year at the Manhattan School of Music. "In Russia, it felt like a dead end. I felt I needed to be in a place like New York, where you get that global culture, musicians from all over the world, these different ingredients. You're free to explore what speaks to you. Listening to Indians playing these crazy instruments in the subway — that influences my sound world. Sometimes I don't know how to make these sounds I hear in my head, and I remember these sounds I heard in the subway and think, 'Oh, maybe I can integrate this.' If you have something you know you want to say, New York is this wonderful resource."

**A Recital
by Lera Auerbach**

- Saturday at 8 p.m.
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Aspen also has figured in her development. She spent four summers here in the mid-'90s and learned to drive on Independence Pass. "24 Preludes" was commissioned by valley residents Tom and Vivian Waldeck (though it premiered at the Caramoor Music Festival in New York state), and Saturday's performance is dedicated to the late Aspenite Saul Barnett, who had been a close friend of Auerbach's. The recital is her first performance here since her student years.

"This is my coming back. After all these years, I am very happy coming back," she said.

Auerbach's output has been extraordinarily prolific and wide-ranging, even without considering the fact that she often appears as a soloist, typically performing programs that include her own work. (She also has time for poetry and says that in Russia, she is better known as a poet than a musician.) Auerbach has written pieces for David Finkel and Wu Han, the Tokyo String Quartet, Hillary Hahn and Gidon Kremer's Kremerata Baltica. She has created operas and ballets; her opera "Gogol," based on her own original play, premiered in Vienna in November, and her ballet "The Little Mermaid" (which has little connection to the Disney version) has been performed more than 150 times since its 2005 debut in Copenhagen, Denmark. In 2012 alone, there are premieres of ballets, orchestral pieces, chamber music and her Quartet No. 6. Next year will have premieres of several ballets, two string quartets and orchestral and vocal music. Auerbach is currently the composer in residence with the Staatskapelle Dresden in Germany. From Aspen she heads to Vermont for a residency at the Marlboro Music Festival.

Among her recent pieces is one written as part of her Dresden residency. The work began as a requiem but morphed into "Ode to Peace," inspired by the destruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche — Church of Our Lady — in the final days of World War II and its reconstruction as a symbol of reconciliation. It is a piece that

AUERBACH B20

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AUERBACH FROM B6

affirms Auerbach's belief that a concert can be a monumental experience: 90 minutes long, with a text that uses 40 languages, passages from the five major religions and a prayer offered by a pastor after the 9/11 attacks.

"It addresses today — war and religious conflict," said Auerbach, who is Jewish. "It was an enormous undertaking, to absorb all this darkness of war, the tragedy of the Dresden bombing, the Holocaust, and give it form that somehow gives a sense of hope, hope for hope, for peaceful coexistence of religions."

Auerbach has no doubt that leaving Russia was the right move. She expresses sadness that her parents, who now live in New York City, missed the early part of her career.

"Looking back, I realize how many things could have gone wrong, how fortunate I've been to meet some wonderful col-

'I think I had lucky stars; things have been very generous to me.'

Lera Auerbach, pianist

leagues," she said. "I think I had lucky stars; things have been very generous to me."

Auerbach doesn't miss Russia or Chelyabinsk. What she misses most is the language.

"It's difficult to be separated from the language, from the reader," she said, in reference to her poetry. "I think what one misses is one's childhood. Not the country itself. That's why we have memories, the gift of remembering."

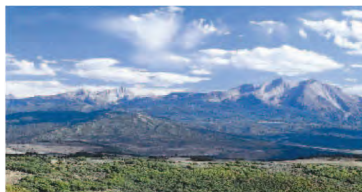


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