

EAST SIDE FAMILY

Lake Sidelines: *wed, MAY 8, 1974*

Hitting the talent jackpot

By JANET BRANDT

There is no accounting for talent.

That as yet inexplicable combination of genetic ingredients spins off the right set of abilities like so many oranges on a slot machine. The jackpot can produce a Maria Callas or a Hank Aaron.

Vladimir Pafnutieff possesses an unusual set of abilities that have put him way above average in three separate, and seemingly unrelated, areas. We sat and talked with him about them recently in the corner booth of the Russian Fantasia restaurant which he and his wife, Eugenia, own and manage.

Born in Russia on his father's estate in the province of Viatka, Vladimir's speech still carries the strong flavor of his Russian heritage. Music was an important part of his family life. His father had a finely trained voice and his mother was a pianist.

But, like many Russian families, the revolutionary upheaval uprooted the Pafnutieffs and sent them on a journey that ended in northern China. The family settled temporarily in Harbin, Manchuria.

"While we lived there, I went to high school and sang in the chorus," Vladimir said. "It was the first singing I did formally."

But the family wasn't through moving. Things were unsettled in China and five years after arriving there, Vladimir, his sister and mother, booked passage for San Francisco.

"We arrived there the day before I was 18," he said. "And very soon after, my mother started me with voice lessons."

Among his teachers over the learning years, was Tetrzini Monotti, a former professor at Milan Conservatory.

Although the years brought many types of singing his way,



Vladimir Pafnutieff

Vladimir loved the soaring music of the opera. He has presented many concerts, "too many" he says, but those recalled with high favor from the performer's viewpoint were the operatic performances. Among them, a leading role in "The Snow Maiden" staged at the San Francisco Opera House as part of the Russian Festival and Ballet.

Since bringing his family to Kirkland four years ago, Vladimir has performed twice. He also teaches a few select students.

Development of his second talent into a world-recognized mastery also began in high school in China. He began playing chess. Development of mental discipline and the skills of strategy moved him quickly to the ranges of the more promising young players. That position was enhanced in 1929 with a win by the 17-year-old Russian over a grand master taking first prize in chess competition.

During the years that followed, Vladimir played some of the great names in chess, always acquitting himself well. He now holds the designation of master and his own name is well known to enthusiasts of the game on the East Side as well as elsewhere in the world.

Looking through his clipping file as we visited in the little restaurant was like running through a roster of celebrities in and out of the chess world. Among them were Gottfried Reinhardt, former president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, and Madam Piatrigorski, wife of the famous cellist, looking from newspaper pictures with Vladimir.

Eugenia leaned against the edge of the booth filling in details of her husband's experiences in music and chess. When we asked about the trophies lining a shelf, and the chess matches they recalled, her brown eyes laughed.

"Half of them are for tennis, you know," she said.

We didn't know.

Vladimir has been playing top flight tennis for years. About 38 to be exact. He belongs to the U. S. Professional Umpires Association and has umpired many a match. He is a regular entrant in the National Senior Indoor Court Championships held at the Seattle Tennis Club in the over 60 bracket.

"But what I would really like to do," he said, "is help young people with their game."

"You know, I helped Rosie Casals with her game," he said.

"I must have played tennis with her at least 100 times."

Recalling his years in tennis brings back some of the great names. Like that of his teacher, Don Budge, former U.S. men's singles champion, and another little girl he remembers, Billie Jean King.

What do these three areas of endeavor have in common other than Vladimir?

"Well, chess and tennis both need mental training; style and plans for how to win," he said.

That is a game plan that calls for dedication and hard work. Even when you hit the talent jackpot.