

Jul Levi With His Parents And Sister



This is my family. Here we are: my mother Victoria Levi, my father Efraim Levi, my sister Rene Gershon, nee Levi and I - the little Jul Levi. This picture was taken in the time when we lived in Greece, that is in 1931 in Salonika.

I was born in Salonica on 19th June 1930. Obviously the Franco-Sephardi roots of my maternal kin had their say. So, I was named after my maternal grandfather, who was Jeuda Merkado Ovadia. I'll always remember Grandmother Donna with her noble beauty and the songs she sang to me from the cradle until I became a pupil. The songs with which she put me to sleep were the wonderful Spanish romances 'La paloma', 'Maria la O,' and 'Donde estas korason.'

My mother was always kind and smiling. I would always remember her with a book in her hand, or even more often on her lap and some knitting in her hands. She was very good at knitting and made wonderful sweaters, hats and gloves. She was also an excellent housewife and housekeeper. Probably I inherited my interest in cooking from her. Thanks to my mother, Rene and I learned three languages. At home we spoke Ladino and French and at school and on the street, Greek. In fact, all our relatives knew many languages. My father knew the most: Ladino, Bulgarian, French, Romanian, Italian, Greek, and he could read and write in Ivrit. At the beginning of the last century every intelligent Jew in Salonica knew at least three languages.

At our home in Salonica there were a lot of records. They were all opera and symphonic pieces. My sister played the piano. She was seven years older than me and studied music and singing from an early age. I remember that there was music playing at home all the time. Either Caruso would be heard from the gramophone or my sister would be singing and playing. Sometimes I would be taken for a walk to the 'White Tower' , in front of which there was a park with an orchestra, which I was told I loved as a child. A number of years later I heard the same orchestra playing the famous overtures by Suppe, 'The Light Cavalry' and 'Peasant and Poet'. Nobody could foresee that I would become a conductor and those overtures would be part of my concert repertory.