

A woman with short reddish-brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved top and light-colored pants, is sitting on a black plastic chair in a grassy field. She is playing a dark reddish-brown cello. The background is a blurred forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. The overall mood is peaceful and artistic.

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Susan Lamb Cook

By Dawn Blunk

Photography by Jeremy Pangilinan

Leading Ladies

Long hours of hard work perfecting their crafts have paid off for performers who move and inspire audiences. Whether they use their bodies, voices or nimble fingers, these five powerhouse performers have generated a buzz in the Sacramento-area performing arts scene.

*Susan Lamb Cook, cellist;
professor of music, University of Cali-
fornia, Davis; director, Sacramento
Youth Symphony Chamber Music
Workshop*

When cellist Susan Lamb Cook is not teaching her cello and chamber music to students at the University of California, Davis, giving private lessons, performing in concert or directing the Sacramento Youth Symphony Chamber Music Workshop, she tries to practice at least three hours a day. "I need my calluses," says Lamb Cook, pointing to her thumb and index finger. "You have to keep practicing or your calluses go away. You have to be able to put the string there and not feel any pain."

Lamb Cook says her family's musical background influenced her own musical endeavors. Her father, Norman Lamb, served as principal violist of the Sacramento Symphony for 35 years and was chair of the music department at California State University, Sacramento, during his 20-year tenure. Her mother coordinated the Crocker concert series for 10 years and her sister is a professional violinist.

"Music raises the level of quality of life," says Lamb Cook, who also shares her passion with her four musically inclined children, George, Celene, Danny and Angelo. "It gives you such a different perspective of even the most mundane aspects of life like going to the

grocery store or doing laundry. We need something uplifting to bring us out of that and to make it all worthwhile."

As a soloist, Lamb Cook has performed with orchestras in Europe, the Middle East and all around the United States. During the early '80s, she became one of the founding members of the Women's Chamber Orchestra of Austria—a controversial feat, as women were not allowed to perform in major orchestras there at the time. In Verona, Italy, she performed with Luciano Pavarotti to a crowd of 35,000. After returning to the States, Lamb Cook recorded a CD, *Rachmaninoff, Works for Cello and Piano*, and co-authored, with her father *Guide to Teaching with Strings*, now in its seventh edition. "I love performing and playing my cello. But then I also get great satisfaction watching my students perform well," says Lamb Cook, who will perform with the Paradise Symphony in October and as a soloist with the Sacramento Youth Symphony on April 28, 2002. "My goal is not only to promote music, especially with young people, but to also promote a high level of performance."