Spotlight: Myriam Avalos Teie, Guest of Honor at the upcoming Gala
Myriam has been on the Apple Hill summer faculty for many years. As a Peruvian-American, she helped organize the Apple Hill tour to Peru in 2017. Here, Myriam talks about her experiences with Apple Hill.

Photo (from left): Apple Hill Director Lenny Matczynski, Director of the National Conservatory of Peru Carmen Escobedo, Myriam Avalos Teie, and the Apple Hill String Quartet: Mike Kelley, Elise Kuder, Colleen Jennings, and Rupert Thompson

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What is the story of your involvement with Apple Hill?
I was invited to perform and coach at the Apple Hill Summer Chamber Music Workshop in June 1999. This was the first of many subsequent, extraordinary sessions in Apple Hill. There was great music, kindness, respect, acceptance, fellowship, hope, joy. “Was this Utopia?” I asked myself. Couldn’t be, because Utopia is imaginary and Apple Hill is REAL!! It was an emotional and transcendent experience for me, one that I treasure forever. I might add the amusing memories of my arriving to Apple Hill with two large suitcases, summer dresses, high heel sandals and an iron to press my dresses. After the first night in my cabin, I bought sweat pants, hoodies, and sturdy sneakers and used my iron to warm up my pillow and sheets, and use it as a huggable teddy bear!! I was cold!!
I have sent several piano and string students to the summer workshops, each of them embracing the spirit of Apple Hill and returning again and again.

**What were some of your favorite moments from the Apple Hill tour in Peru last spring?**

Firstly, I would say, spending time with this amazing group of musicians—five real and genuine people. They play, teach, and present the same way they truly are—dedicated, respectful and accepting. Another highlight was to see the sparkle in the eyes of the young students when performing at their final concert: There was magic, fellowship, oneness...hope and joy!! They were now richer, more mature, with new horizons ahead of them. There was a great difference between the students in Lima and those in Cusco. The former were very well trained and prepared. The latter had fewer channels of exposure to performances, to worldly educators, and to all the many facets of the musical profession. Unsurprisingly, all students in Lima and Cusco became better listeners and communicators, regardless of their performance level, and more energized to pursue their musical path.

I also want to mention Eileen Sarson, President of the Board, since she accompanied us through our tour. Eileen was delightful and so impressively independent and supportive. She was very respectful of our working time, and ventured alone in both Lima and Cusco with her Spanish-English dictionary, on her own!! She attended our concerts, joined us at some of our meals, and charmed all Peruvians, starting with me!!

**What were your thoughts about the Apple Hill String Quartet learning and performing the String Quartet by Celso Garrido Lecca, a Peruvian composer not often heard in the US?**

I was impressed by the respect, commitment, and integrity demonstrated towards this work. Lenny did thorough research on the historical background of this piece, on Celso Garrido Lecca’s social and political stands, and on his compositional training. The quartet worked rigorously and performed it brilliantly. The professors at the National Conservatory of Peru in Lima, some of whom knew Celso personally and through his
many other works, were very moved and affected by a rediscovery and a reaffirmation of the powers of this great composer.

**What are some special aspects of Peruvian culture that you are hoping Gala attendees in New Hampshire can learn more about?**

We express our fondness and affections through hugs, kisses, smiles and FOOD!! Our folklore is rich in its pre-Colombian and post-Colombian culture—dialects, music and dance, literature, food, and beverages. We are very proud of it and love to share it with the world!

**Can you tell us about the Vendimia festival?**

It takes place on the first days of March—our harvest month in Peru—and there are varied celebrations across the country. The International Grape Harvest Festival in Ica, El Festival Internacional de la Vendimia de Ica, pays tribute to Ica, a very important area south of Lima. Our southern coastline has the perfect climate for grape growing and wineries. The region of Ica is the heartland of wine and Pisco production in all of the southern coast. The city of Pisco—the Quechua name for bird—is in Ica, and was once a prosperous port during the Spanish colony. The vendimia ceremony begins when young ladies pull the grapes from the vines and place them in large baskets. All the attendants watch while sipping wine, pisco, and cachina, and eating “tejas” (sugar or chocolate-covered candies, always filled with dulce de leche, and your choice of pisco-infused raisins, pecans, cashews, golden berries, lucumas, and other exotic fruits). The Queen of the Vendimia is chosen and crowned, and she and her court begin the “pisa de la uva”—the stomping of the grapes. Beauty queens from other countries are also in attendance. The festival lasts over a week. There are sumptuous dances every night; and during the day, there are dance, sand board, and gastronomic competitions, art, music, agricultural and agroindustrial fairs, dancing Paso Horses’ shows, canine races, and the big parade at the end, where the beauty queens greet the crowds and throw grape clusters from their colorful floats. It is like a Harvest Carnival!!