

# Heritage Celebrations

Lebanese, Hungarian, and Moroccan events draw VIP crowds

BY GAIL SCOTT



ABOVE: Victoria Reggie Kennedy, Rima Al-Sabah, and Nicole Chedid at the celebration of Lebanese artists  
RIGHT: George Pataki at the Hungarian American Coalition dinner  
(Photos by Kyle Samperton)



## LEBANON'S UNVEILING

Guess what

**Vicki Kennedy**, **Lucky Roosevelt**, and Secretary of Transportation **Ray LaHood** have in common? All are of Lebanese heritage and proud of it – the main reason they came to American University's Katzen Center on April 7 to celebrate "Convergence: New Art From Lebanon" along with **Rima Al-Sabah**, *CBS News*' **Chris Isham**, *Washington Post* editor **Marcus Brauchli**, Obama Administration arts advocate **Rachel Goslins**, **Nora Boustany**, **Juliette Kayyem**, and event sponsor **Mario Saradar**. Lebanese Ambassador **Antoine Chedid** and his wife **Nicole** decided their country's recovery could be best explained by the work of 29 experimental contemporary artists, including **Nabil Nahas**, **Nadim Karam**, **Mario Saba**, and **Huguette Caland** (daughter of former Lebanese President

**Bechara El-Khoury** who proclaimed the country's independence in 1945). "This is the beginning of the flowering of our culture again," said Nicole Chedid, who somehow persuaded French Chef **Michel Richard** to create and prepare the menu. "He loves our food," she added with a smile.

## 'AMERICA'S GOVERNOR' HONORED

Claiming he had "stuffed cabbage," not paprika, running through his veins, three-time N.Y. Gov. **George Pataki** (Pah-TAH-key, not Pa-TACK-e) accepted the Hungarian-American Coalition's award for distinguished service in promoting relations between the U.S. and Hungary at the House of Sweden on April 22. Guests included 2009 honoree **John C. Whitehead**, who aided Hungarian freedom fighters in 1956 and was Pataki's choice to head up N.Y.'s 9-11 recovery; **April Foley**, former U.S. ambassador to Hungary;

Hungarian Ambassador **Béla Szombati** and his wife **Zsuzsa**; **Mary Mochary**; and **Aniko Gaal Schott**. Scared of politics, Pataki, whose father was Hungarian, urged guests to "fight the discriminating Language Law" in Slovakia so that it protects, rather than violates, human rights." According to the Coalition, the legislation requires all Slovaks, including the Hungarian-speaking minority, to speak only Slovakian. "With this new law," Pataki explained, "the Hungarian medic taking care of an elderly Hungarian patient can't comfort his patient in his or her native language. This is discrimination."

## PLAYING TO YOUR AUDIENCE

When WPAS President **Neale Perl**, who is also a cellist, is in the audience, performers pay

attention. In a recent concert at the Moroccan residence, pianist **Marouan Benabdallah** made sure to play Camille Saint-Saëns' "The Swan," a cellist favorite. Afterwards, Perl complimented the musician as "very gifted, a great communicator who plays with tremendous color."

That's exactly what hostess **Maria-Felice Mekouar** wanted to hear about this son of a Moroccan physicist father and Hungarian musician mother. "Many young musicians produce technically perfect notes," she said, "But Marouan offers so much more. His openness, easiness with people, and generosity is so Moroccan, while the rigor of his thoroughly European musical education is so Hungarian. **Esther Coopersmith** immediately signed him up to play for Laura Bush at the National Museum of Women in the Arts' American University in Afghanistan benefit on June 10.

## ICELAND NOT MOVING ... FOR NOW

After dealing first with their country's economic chaos and then the awkwardness of disrupting world travel on account of volcanic ash from the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, Icelandic Ambassador **Hjálmar Hannesson** and his wife **Anna** have one thing to be happy about these days: they no longer have to move. Their stone manse in Kalorama, which was to be sold as an economic belt-tightening move, has been taken off the market. Jovial by nature, Iceland's man in Washington is philosophical about the unpredictable volcano. "Of course we're sorry, but there's nothing we can do. In Iceland, we are quite used to having some kind of rumblings every five years in the highlands where no one lives." The last big eruption, he points out, was in 1918 – before jet air travel. "Human beings are very small when nature shows its force." **WL**