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A: both

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ORLANDO, Fla. (Ivanhoe Broadcast News) -- Even at a young age, Leandra Ramm was a performer. Now at 22, she is an award-winning opera singer and has studied at the prestigious Manhattan School of Music.



"I sang my whole life pretty much because my mom is a pianist, so I kind of, like, grew up with music," she says.

Was it her upbringing or her genes that made her talented? Leandra's parents couldn't conceive, so they selected a sperm donor. Not just any donor -- they got the sperm from the genius sperm bank.



"I think every mother and father thinks that when they have a child it is going to be wonderful, beautiful and intelligent and talented, right? This was the same thing," says Leandra's father, David.

Leandra's mother, Adrienne, says, "It felt like the next best thing to having my own husband's sperm."

In 1980, scientist Robert Graham opened the genius sperm bank -- officially called The Repository for Germinal Choice. Hoping to create a generation of geniuses, he gave the sperm of Nobel Prize winners and men with high IQs to women around the country. Twenty-six years later, the first wave of children whose mothers received the "genius" sperm are grown up.

"[Graham] thought too many stupid people were having too many children," David Plotz, Washington-based author of "[The Genius Factory: The Curious History of the Nobel Prize Sperm Bank](#)," tells Ivanhoe. He has researched the project for more than five years. "What Robert Graham did is he turned infertility into a consumer business, and he turned sperm banks ... into catalog shopping."

The Repository produced more than 200 children over 19 years. It shut down in 1999 after Robert Graham died. Only three Nobel Prize winners actually participated in the project and none produced children. Donors were anonymous and color-coded. Fuchsia was a world champion in his field. Turquoise headed a research lab. Moss played the flute and guitar.

Adrienne picked clear...



"Clear was a scientist, research scientist, and he had done important research in his field, and he loved music," Adrienne says. But did it work?

Leandra is clearly musically talented, and she tested in the gifted range with an IQ over 135.

"I think you have to look at who the mothers are. What kind of woman goes to a sperm bank that is known as the Nobel Prize sperm bank?" Plotz says. "It is a woman who is determined to raise a child who is going to be accomplished."

The project left some wondering: What's next in the quest for smart kids?

Lee Silver, Ph.D., a molecular biologist at Princeton and author of "[Challenging Nature: The Clash of Science and Spirituality at the New Frontiers of Life](#)," says there are ways to isolate genes associated with intelligence.

Researchers have already bred a mouse with a larger cerebral cortex -- a key part of the brain that supports complex thinking. They've also

The Genius Factory
The Curious History of the Nobel Prize Sperm Bank

DAVID PLOTZ
[The Genius Factory](#)

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engineered mice to remember new things as they age. But there are obstacles when it comes to doing this in humans.

"The concept of intelligence isn't a single entity. Somebody may have talents in mathematics, but be a lousy writer," Dr. Silver tells Ivanhoe. He says what you do with the talent is important. "You can be born with all the musical talent in the world, but if you don't practice the piano, you're not going to be a great musician."

Leandra agrees. "It's definitely a combination between genes and the background that I had growing up, and I think I was really lucky to have great parents," she says.

Nature and nurture -- the combination she says makes for a winning performance.

This article was reported by Ivanhoe.com, who offers Medical Alerts by e-mail every day of the week. To subscribe, go to: <http://www.ivanhoe.com/newsalert/>.

If you would like more information, please contact:

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