



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dino Kartsonakis: A World-Renowned Pianist with a Heart for the Gospel

Guest(s): Dino and Cheryl Kartsonakis

Air Date: October 17, 2025

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and today we're bringing you a conversation that's been years in the making with a man whose musical gifts have touched millions of lives all around the world. Grammy Award-winning pianist, Dino Kartsonakis has been captivating audiences for over six decades. From sold out performances at Carnegie Hall to becoming the first person to ever perform inside the Tower of David in Jerusalem, Dino's extraordinary talent and showmanship have made him one of the premier performers of our time. His journey took him to the Julliard School of Music and also European conservatories where he studied under legendary pianist Arthur Rubenstein. He's performed for presidents, toured across continents, and recorded more than 50 albums. But what's truly remarkable is how God planted this gift in Dino's heart at a very young age and how that gift has become his ministry. For Dino, music has always been more than just performance, it's been his pulpit, his way of sharing the gospel and pointing people to Jesus Christ. And throughout his incredible career, he's remained committed to strengthening families and encouraging the next generation. Values he shares very deeply with Dr. James Dobson and our ministry here at JDFI. I had the privilege of sitting down with Dino and his wife Cheryl, at our Colorado Springs headquarters not too long ago. Let's listen into that conversation right now.

Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I am Roger Marsh, and I have a confession to make though I grew up in a very musical family and two of my children are professional music educators, I'm somewhat biblically jealous of our next guest today here at Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. It is our privilege to welcome Dino Kartsonakis to our broadcast. He's a living legend. I mean, this is a man who...

Dino Kartsonakis: Oh really? I'm living.

Roger Marsh: And your legendary.

Dino Kartsonakis: And I'm living for sure.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, that's for sure. Dino, welcome to the program.

Dino Kartsonakis: Well, thank you so much. My wife, Cheryl's here with us.

Roger Marsh: It's good to see you as well, Cheryl.

Cheryl Kartsonakis: Thank you so much.

Dino Kartsonakis: And we're here for this wonderful gathering.

Roger Marsh: Yes. It's so good to have you here for that. And I know that your relationship with Dr. Dobson over the years, it's very special.

Dino Kartsonakis: What a man. A man. He stood out to me and what I liked is that he stood, even though the majority would be against whatever his belief was, but even though sometimes in the minority, he stood strong and never budged one bit about the family.

Roger Marsh: Well, and it's interesting when you see, I mean, your commitment to musical excellence, for example in the ministry. I mean it started at a very young age. You were three, and we'll throw a little counterpoint at people here. I mean, every now and again, we know a 3-year-old will get up on a piano stool and start pounding on the keys, right?

Dino Kartsonakis: Well, let me tell you how.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, I was going to say your story is different. Somebody noticed right away that you had a prodigy in you.

Dino Kartsonakis: Well, we'll go before I was born, okay, because my mother was pregnant with me and she had fallen and the doctors had said that the baby was a stillborn child, which was me. And it was my dear grandmother. She was being Greek. She was very strong. She looked like Golda Meir, if you want to picture that. But she loved God and she knew how to pray. But she prayed me through and she committed my life and my mother did, dad was not a Christian at the time, that I would someday serve the Lord. Didn't know what it would be, but she actually saw a vision in her little apartment on Ninth Avenue in New York City near the bus terminal. I'll never forget that place because that was filled with prayer where she prayed every day and she had a vision of the enemy, the devil, that had a grip around her daughter's, my mom's waist, trying to destroy the child that was within her. And the vision was that she saw this image that took a grip on my mom and it just squeezed. And she said immediately "In the name of Jesus, we rebuke Satan. He must go." And she lived on the fifth floor of this apartment house and it's really hard to believe, but it really did happen. And the devil is real, there's no doubt about it.

And she actually saw that he released my mother and literally heard the devil running down the steps out of the apartment house. That's how real it was. She called my mother right after that and she said, "Helen, how are you feeling?" My mom took a deep breath. She said, "I'm okay. I feel better today." She said, "Let's go to the doctor." So there's a Greek doctor we went to Papalooppolis, whatever, something like that. You can die before you sign his name.

Roger Marsh: Exactly.

Dino Kartsonakis: But anyway, it was a miracle. So as a result of that, of course I was born. Very much alive, but it wasn't till I was three years old and we had this upright piano in our apartment that was given to our family by some Greek relatives. They wanted to get rid of it, but that was a Lord.

Roger Marsh: No, they wanted to enhance your musical experience.

Dino Kartsonakis: Exactly. Well, I didn't play piano at that time, but they said, asked my mother Helen, would you like to have this piano? And she said, yes. So they delivered to the apartment, and that was the instrument that I first played. The very first song I ever played in the piano was "At the Cross, At the Cross" at three years old. I walked up to the piano and it started picking out the melody. I was in church, my parents, sometimes I think I was born in the first pew of my church. Glad Tidings Tabernacle 20 Point Street. And so I heard that song and came home and started playing, one finger on the piano. And my mother kind of tiptoed behind me, not to disturb me. And the Lord spoke to her spirit saying, "This is the gift that I've given your son. He'll evangelize through the piano."

Roger Marsh: Interesting.

Dino Kartsonakis: Which is really an amazing thing because there's no such thing as evangelizing with the piano and music. But fast forward, here we are. And of course I've studied piano. I always feel that as any young person that has an ability of some kind, you need to focus on that. First, identify what that is. And then my parents did. So I had to take piano lessons from Ms. Smith. Sometimes I think everybody took from Ms. Smith and she would give me some music to learn. And this is really little bit later, about five years old. And then I was able to go to the left hand, the right hand, but I played by ear that whole time until I was five.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Dino Kartsonakis: And then she'd give me these classical pieces and she'd say, "Now read your notes, Dino," as I'm playing. Well, I was interested in the notes because all I had to do is hear it. And I'd hear one time and I'd go home, play it like Ms. Smith, come back and I'd opened the book to the right page. A little Greek boy fooled his teacher because I was pretending like I was playing by notes. It took her a while to figure it out.

Roger Marsh: I just say, when did you get caught?

Dino Kartsonakis: I finally got caught. And when I did, Ms. Smith calls my mother into the studio and says your son has no reason for him to take piano lessons. He's got this gift. But my mother, I really appreciate this. She insisted that I should take piano. And I'm glad I did because then the classical piano came in. Studying of piano, which I did majored in college at Julliard.

Roger Marsh: Was there anyone that you modeled yourself after?

Dino Kartsonakis: Not really. Well, I shouldn't say that. Our church pianist, and her name was Betty Orphan, but she was a wonderful, had a wonderful touch, and I'd listened to her every Sunday. So I admired her playing. And so I would say she, but later on in life, it would've been Rubenstein Horowitz and all these great pianists. Actually I studied in Europe. Rubenstein had a masterclass there, and Nadia Boulanger was the educator, music educator, the amazing lady. And so the Lord had opened some wonderful doors for me to learn from some of the best people.

Roger Marsh: Yeah, it's incredible to think that you had the inner gift, the ear training that you were able to give yourself with Ms. Smith, and then the classical training, and then to be able to move through college and into your young adult years. And I still, I smile every time I think of your grand piano and being an evangelistic tool. And that's just not something you think of it as. But early on...

Dino Kartsonakis: It's my pulpit really. We've seen life's touched by the power of God through music. Anointed music. We always ask the Holy Spirit to be with us. As I play, I always, I couldn't do without the Holy Spirit. That's what really communicates.

Roger Marsh: No question. No question. And it's just such a joy to get to know Dino Kartsonakis and his wife Cheryl today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk as we talk about six decades of musical praise, I mean from arguably the most prolific pianist in the kingdom today right now. I don't think anybody has a shot at coming close to how many albums you've recorded, how many concerts you've given, how many millions of people you've impacted through television and other sources of media too. It'd probably be exhausting if you sat there and tried to tally it all up.

Dino Kartsonakis: Well, I'm thankful that I've encouraged young, inspired young pianists. Matter of fact, we do our ministry, Dino and Cheryl International Ministry, we give scholarships to young pianists. Like when I performed in some city, prior to going there, we get tapes or...

Roger Marsh: Videos.

Dino Kartsonakis: Video of these young pianists from seven to 16 years old, and we audition them and then we present a scholarship, a \$1000 check so they could put it towards their music.

Roger Marsh: Wonderful.

Dino Kartsonakis: So this is, again, encouraging young people to work on their gift. And because I believe that God really expressed us to do our very best in whatever we do.

Roger Marsh: Amen.

Dino Kartsonakis: That's why Dr. Dobson and his ministry, I mean, there are times he stood alone for what he believed.

Roger Marsh: I love that. I love the fact that you recognized that in him and he saw that in you. When did you first meet him?

Dino Kartsonakis: Well, of course, we live in Branson, Missouri. And that's these theaters, so many musical theaters.

Roger Marsh: You've done a show there for how many years?

Dino Kartsonakis: We've done shows there for a long time and big productions. The dancers and the costumes and so on. But at the end, I always present the true meaning of life. And it just so happened that Dr. Dobson and Shirley were in the audience. And I got to tell you, this has never happened before in our show. We've played this many...that particular night, Cheryl and I were dancing on, it was a waltz or something, and she wears these fabulous gowns and this was a real big, big gown. And I fell. I tripped over her.

Roger Marsh: Oh no.

Dino Kartsonakis: Over the gown.

Roger Marsh: Oh no.

Cheryl Kartsonakis: Yes.

Dino Kartsonakis: I did. So anyway, that was the night. That's how I remember.

Cheryl Kartsonakis: We both hit the ground rather hard.

Roger Marsh: Awesome. And the Dobsons were there to cheer you on.

Dino Kartsonakis: They were there.

Cheryl Kartsonakis: And they were there to pray for us that we would survive the fall.

Dino Kartsonakis: But we've known of Dr. Dobson, who doesn't, and his ministry, working with families and helping so many people, parents to raise their children in the right way.

Roger Marsh: And I could see his influence in your work.

Dino Kartsonakis: Yes.

Roger Marsh: The fact that he's such an encourager of people in all different walks of life to take your ministry to the next level.

Cheryl Kartsonakis: And we haven't said that we have children. We have two daughters, we have four grandchildren, and they have been educated because of Dr. Dobson's books and ministry. They have learned so much, and they adore the ministry that Dr. Dobson has put forth for years and years, all of them.

Roger Marsh: That's so key to hear that type of story. Hearing it a lot, we hear it from a lot of parents and grandparents.

Dino Kartsonakis: He has influenced so many.

Roger Marsh: It's literally to the next generation and the next and the next. You guys are living a loving testimony to that.

Dino Kartsonakis: Well, he's in Heaven right now.

Roger Marsh: Yes.

Dino Kartsonakis: And he's with the Lord. His timing or God's timing was about perfect for him to come to the throne of God. I mean, I'm sure he is just an amazing place. But his teaching still has influence on the family. I mean, I really believe, Cheryl and I are praying as this ministry continues, it'll continue to grow. And because it's, like I said, what he teaches is still 30 years ago is still relevant for today's family.

Roger Marsh: Yes. Well, the beautiful thing about basing your ministry on eternal principles.

Dino Kartsonakis: Yes.

Roger Marsh: And the fact that I was noticing that you have an album, *A Sanctuary Sound* where you're talking about hymns, the hymns. What is it about those things that we learned as children? And you hear them again in a later season of life and all of a sudden they take on a deeper meaning.

Dino Kartsonakis: I'm glad you brought up about the hymns because one day, well, this is when Dr. Billy Graham passed away, I decided to get on Facebook. We've never done that before. And I wanted to just play the music that you would've heard at Billy Graham crusade. And these were the great hymns of the church.

Roger Marsh: Bev Shea singing and all that.

Dino Kartsonakis: So I did just, it was amazing the response. 50,000 people came on.

Roger Marsh: Wow. Nice.

Dino Kartsonakis: And as though the Lord spoke to my heart saying, see, this is what you need to do. We need to revive the hymns because they've fallen away. And I love the new things too. Not all of it, but things that are really anointed. I'm sure well written, but the hymns are sermons in themselves. I mean, so as a result of that, we put out a hymn book, and in that hymn book, I selected 100 hymns. 101 actually, and I asked Cheryl if she would write on the opposite page with the hymn, a little history about the hymn.

Roger Marsh: Oh, wonderful.

Dino Kartsonakis: A little devotional with Scripture and the prayer at the end. And God is really blessed it. People are hungry for the hymns again. I mean, really. They're just fantastic.

Roger Marsh: Well, they're hungry for the truth, the truth, Cheryl, you were saying they want to know that there is a truth, that it's helpful and beneficial. And of course, God's truth is truth. I mean, he's the author of truth. So the principle is your teaching, whether it's through song, whether it's through stories with kids, stage productions, whatever the gifts and talents that we have, we have to use them. And I know that Dr. Dobson had a tremendous gift of communication. I mean, just par none. There's no one who could compare with him. And you the same way have that musical gift. And you too have the, I mean, the fact that you can work together in ministry and in marriage, and still for those who are listening right now, we don't have the cameras going. But if you could see the way Cheryl looks at Dino. As a husband, I'm going, I want that 40 years into marriage. I mean you do because there's that partnership.

Dino Kartsonakis: We're one. And again, with Dr. Dobson, I keep bringing him back because it's very important that people understand what an amazing ministry he still has. And I'm going to say this again like I said at the beginning of the interview, he stood strong when he was accused and whatever the enemy was trying to destroy. Sometimes he may have been alone in this, but he did it. He believed it. He believed in the truth. You know what I'm saying?

Roger Marsh: Yes.

Dino Kartsonakis: The majority may have not agreed with it, but he stood for what was right. And as a result of that, God really blessed and favored his life in such a way that, I mean, he turned around and everywhere you look, people who have families. We're in Christian circles. We travel, although we've done Carnegie Hall and

some other secular things, but the influence he's had on the family, it's just amazing. It's fantastic. So that ministry will continue, no doubt.

Roger Marsh: Yes. We are fully anticipating a long and healthy future for the James Dobson family.

Dino Kartsonakis: Oh, it's going to be amazing.

Roger Marsh: We call it a dynamic legacy because now the Doctor is with the Lord, but the teachings live on and the principles live on.

Dino Kartsonakis: The vision is still there.

Roger Marsh: It is. It absolutely is.

Dino Kartsonakis: We may have to use new tools more current.

Roger Marsh: The way that we are presenting the material and the legacy continuing to the different platforms. You brought up an example that I think kind of mirrors where we are when you were discussing when Billy Graham passed away and you took to Facebook, a social media platform, to play old time hymns. And so here's something from our past that that is eternal, and you just found a different platform for it and 50,000 people showed up. I mean, that's the life that we're in right now.

Dino Kartsonakis: That's it.

Roger Marsh: And that's what we're experiencing here at the James Dobson Family Institute. And your kind words, Dino, regarding Doctor and his life and legacy, and the fact that you still remain friends even after that mishap.

Dino Kartsonakis: Oh, yes.

Roger Marsh: With the ballroom spinning and the... not that you would never, but I'm sure that's the kind of thing Doctor loved. You were out there doing what God called you to do.

Dino Kartsonakis: Exactly. And tumbles happen.

Roger Marsh: It's how you recover from those tumbles. That's what he would say.

Dino Kartsonakis: And in our ministry may be different for some. It's music, it's entertainment. We always say we're entertainers, but we're first Christians.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. Absolutely.

Dino Kartsonakis: We always will present the message that Jesus Christ is the son of God, and He came to serve, was born in the manger, grew up to become the Savior of this world, and soon coming King.

Roger Marsh: Yes. Amen.

Dino Kartsonakis: We should invite Him into our hearts.

Roger Marsh: It's interesting, when I was thinking about your role in music and how you could have very easily found a good living playing the piano, and you recognized though, because of the spiritual impact in your life, from your mother, your grandmother, all the people that were speaking into it at the time, you knew that God had a higher calling for you than just winding up being an accompanist somewhere or directing a choir.

Dino Kartsonakis: Whatever.

Roger Marsh: Or schools or whatever it was. And the fact that you, with your instrument and your abilities, and the two of you now with your ministry have been able to literally crisscross the globe.

Dino Kartsonakis: And God has blessed us tremendously. Every day we have the favor that He gives us. When you stay in His word and you put it in your heart and you live it, He'll give you favor and bless us, whatever, financially and with health. And it's a great way to live. And everyone who's listening right now needs to know that Jesus Christ is such a loving father. That He wants to give us the desires of our heart within His perfect will. And it's the only way to live today. Until one day that trumpet of the Lord will sound and we'll be caught up in the air in a twinkling of an eye. And I may be playing piano when I get to Heaven, but I hope so. It'll be all new music.

Roger Marsh: Yes. Yes. That's for sure. New and eternal. It is amazing. And my dad used to tell me this as a music educator when I was trying out for sports and not making teams. He'd say, "Well, that's okay. Stick with an instrument. Stay with the choir. You could keep doing that long after those athletes can't perform." That's true. Right. And I'm sitting here watching the two of you saying, he was right. Darn it. Dad was right again. He always was. But he's 92 and he still enjoys music. And you guys have had so many decades and there's no slowing. I don't see slowing down anywhere. There's no retirement in your...

Dino Kartsonakis: You said something about sports and so on, but I never got into sports except for ping pong. I love ping pong.

Roger Marsh: Okay, that's a sport. That's a tough one.

Dino Kartsonakis: But we admire athletes. Of course, Cheryl's an advent fan of a football team. The guys were out there playing football and all that. The Lord gave me this gift,

and this was my athletic work. And because I had to work on my technique, and you have to go through in any occupation through that period of where you have to learn and study and spend time in your major, and then someday it's going to bloom. Right now, I'm 83 years old and...

Roger Marsh: You are not.

Dino Kartsonakis: Yeah. 83.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Dino Kartsonakis: Yeah. But anyway, I've learned a lot. I still practice, but the way I play now, for the past maybe 10 years, I have felt such a freedom because of all that study I just play and it just comes. The technique is there and the harmonies, and it becomes so easy. And the people sense that. In my audience, I really pray, when I walk out on stage that they will experience the music that I'm playing if it's a hymn. And I usually play hymns that people know so they can hear the words and they'll receive the message. And of course, Cheryl sings, and then we talk and share about our family. We're big on family. We've got two daughters. We've got a lot of... grandchildren... great grandchildren. Four greats. We're into the family big time like Dr. Dobson has taught.

Roger Marsh: Sure. And that's what Scripture talks about the next and the next generation.

Dino Kartsonakis: Right.

Roger Marsh: We're really talking about four generations here.

Cheryl Kartsonakis: Yes.

Roger Marsh: You guys are living it, having four generations in your family that are still very active. And hearing that consistent witness and that I appreciate so much, Dino, the fact that you mentioned that Doctor has stood up in the culture and not necessarily taken a heavy political stance. He just takes a biblical stance.

Dino Kartsonakis: Biblical. Truth.

Cheryl Kartsonakis: Right.

Roger Marsh: And biblical truth will be controversial enough.

Dino Kartsonakis: If the enemy will be out there to destroy. That's what he does. That's his job, but not Dr. Dobson. And we as Christians need to stand strong. Stand strong. When the enemy comes around, it's up here in our mind. We did learn how to just call on the name of Jesus. There is something about that name. There really is.

Roger Marsh: I remember listening to the Gaithers because a lot of that was in our church choir music, and in my youth, I thought, well, this is sweet. But I didn't really, as I'm getting older, *Something About That Name* brings me to tears. *Because He Lives*, I was part of a church fellowship for 30 years, and that was our sending song on Easter Sunday. Every single year.

Dino Kartsonakis: There's power in that name.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. Absolutely.

Dino Kartsonakis: There's hope. There's healing in the name of Jesus. And we did call on His name and whenever adversaries, whatever comes your way, whether it's sickness or depression or there's a lot of that going on right now, this is where Christians have the upper hand because they know who to call upon that'll give peace in the midst of their storm.

Roger Marsh: Amen.

Dino Kartsonakis: Joy, happiness.

Roger Marsh: You are listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and what a joy it has been to spend time with Dino and Cheryl Kartsonakis on today's broadcast. Now, if you'd like to hear this conversation again or share it with someone who really needs encouragement right now, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You'll be glad you did. Dino was one of the most encouraging performers that I've ever had the privilege of talking with. Well, Dino mentioned something today that really resonates with our mission. Here at Family Talk. He spoke about how Dr. James Dobson stood strong for biblical truth even when he stood alone. Friends. That commitment to truth is exactly what we're preserving and expanding through the Dr. James Dobson Memorial Matching Grant. Recently, a group of dear friends of our ministry established this historic matching opportunity, providing matching funds now through December 31, 2025 for up to \$6 million.

This remarkable gift is an incredible memorial and a statement of confidence for the only organization entrusted by Dr. Dobson to carry out his legacy and expand his work to new generations and geographies. Dr. Dobson's teaching on family, marriage, and parenting just as relevant today as it was decades ago. And through this memorial matching grant, every dollar you donate will be doubled in size and impact, placing practical biblical wisdom into the hands and homes of countless families for years to come. Now you can double your impact through this special memorial matching grant by visiting drjamesdobson.org. If you prefer, you can also make a contribution over the phone. Call a member of our constituent care team right now at 877-732-6825.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today. On behalf of all of us here at the JDFI, we truly appreciate your prayers and ongoing support. And

be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.