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STRINGS

Hilary Hahn

returns from sabbatical with powerful creative momentum

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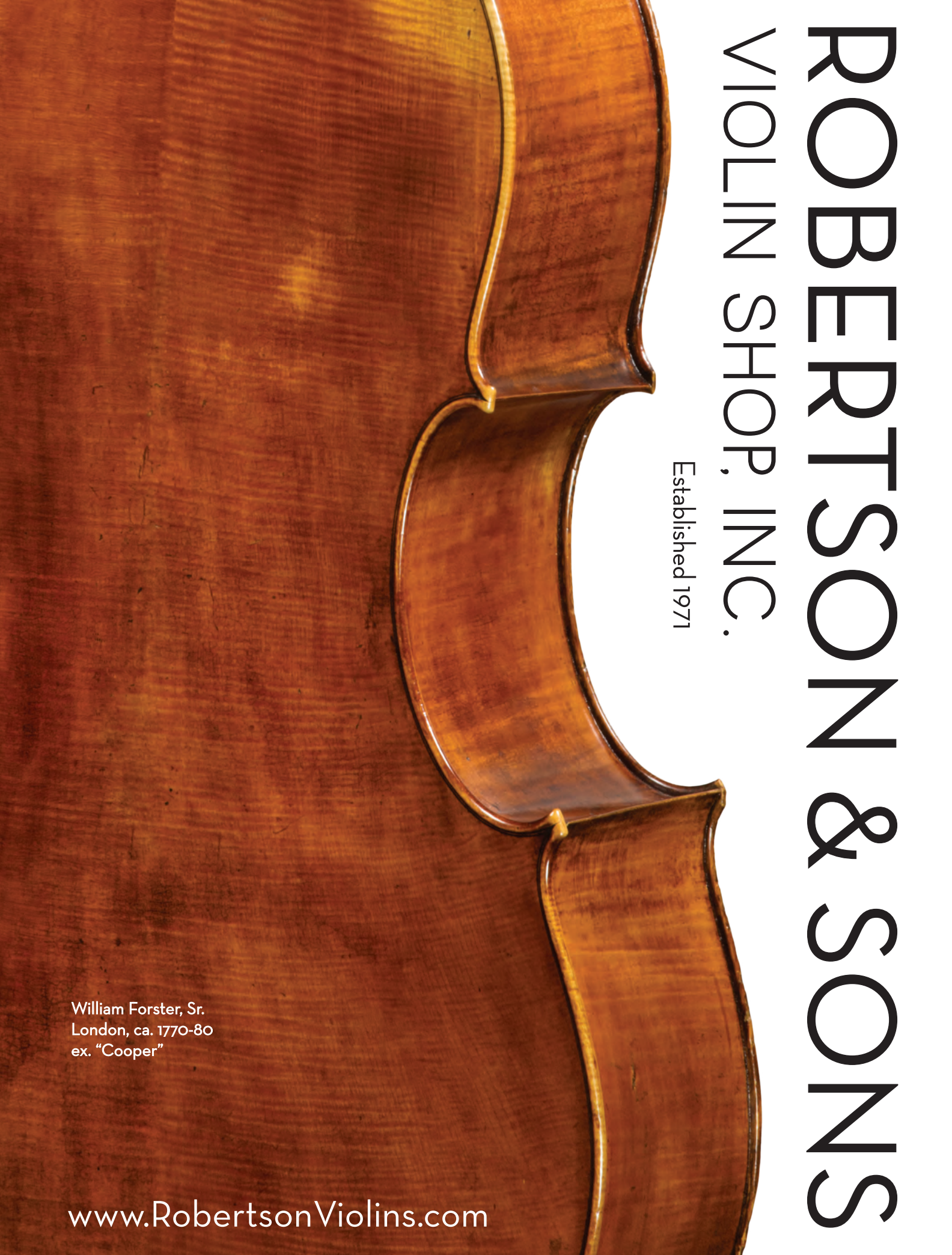
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LAUREN DESBERG

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SPECIAL FOCUS
TEEN STRINGS

MARCH/ APRIL
2021

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PHOTOGRAPHER: OJ SLAUGHTER

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Jessie Montgomery

JIYANG CHEN

The special section in the January/February issue celebrated the passion and positivity of adult amateur players by asking four of them to discuss what string music has contributed (and continues to contribute) to their lives. I'm pleased to report that their adventurous optimism has carried over into this issue's special section, where you'll hear the voices of four teenage string players, all of whom have achieved much in the time they've spent with their instruments. While they may be separated by a stage or two in life, I think you'll find our adult amateur and teen contributors share a delight in seeking out new musical experiences and a commitment to overcoming challenges they find along the way. Music is the light that guides them all, which is no small thing in a world navigating a dark road.

It must be said that violinist Hilary Hahn, with whom London correspondent Inge Kjemtrup caught up in December, seems to have tapped into that same sense of adventurous optimism. Hahn took a year's sabbatical during the 2019/20 season, only to re-enter a dramatically changed professional landscape in the fall of 2020. But you get the sense that her creativity has a fluid quality: when restricted in one direction, it smoothly diverts in another. She has a new album out, paying her respects to a city she holds dear, and has co-founded an organization that explores the creative possibilities of artificial intelligence. She has also kicked off a solo project called, ahem, "Hahn Solo." (I will not pretend I don't find that delightful.) For more on the ever-dynamic Hilary Hahn, read the cover feature.

So when you find a moment for yourself, comfortably sitting with, perhaps, a favorite beverage, I hope you'll enjoy these stories among the many others you'll find in this issue, including features on composer and violinist Jessie Montgomery and the stylistically adventurous Tessa Lark; a short history of Roma fiddling; a discussion of the relative merits of one- and two-piece instrument backs; a lesson on the expressive power of an appoggiatura; and much more.

As always, I'd love to know what you think.

—Megan Westberg

STRINGS

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CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

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Contributing Editors Cristina Schreil, James N. McKean, Darol Anger, Sarah Freiberg, Inge Kjemtrup, Louise Lee, Laurence Vittes, Brian Wise, Thomas May, Patrick Sullivan, Emily Wright

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Stringletter.com

Publisher and Editorial Director David A. Lusterman

FINANCE & OPERATIONS

Chief Operations Officer Anita Evans

General Inquiries AdminDept@stringletter.com

Customer Service StringsService@Stringletter.com

Advertising Inquiries Sales@Stringletter.com

Send e-mail to individuals in this format:

FirstName.LastName@Stringletter.com

Front Desk (510) 215-0010

Customer Service (800) 827-6837 or 714-226-9782

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MAIL & SHIPPING

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Make Waves

Phillip W. Serna, left, Sam Stadlen, and the Miró Quartet

ALL BY ONESELF

Several music services offer the opportunity for ensemble practice, all on your own

By Laurence Vittes

At a time of isolation, online "music minus one" (MMO) services that allow you to practice and feel like part of an ensemble seem like a perfect antidote. In fact, the idea of being able to participate in such a way seems like a perfectly normal expectation for a society that is newly smart with Zoom and other ensemble-type software.

According to Joshua Gindele, a founding member of the Miró quartet, one large tech company early in the pandemic was already "trying to figure out a way to get people to be able to play together in real time without latency. And what they found was that it was fairly easy to do with rock bands and music that had a backbeat they could preplan for; then everybody could come in virtually and they could broadcast together. But it was really hard with chamber music because of all the technical issues around latency and internet bloat."

There has been an actual Music Minus One company since 1950. Now part of Hal Leonard, its 700-plus titles devoted to classical, chamber music, opera, lieder, popular, jazz, and religious music began with Schubert's "Trout" Quintet [the Piano Quintet in A major, D. 667]. In its 21st-century incarnation, the sheet music and additional educational material for each Music Minus One title come in paperback-book form, and the audio is accessed online, including a multi-functional audio player that can change speeds without changing pitch, set loop points, change keys, and pan left or right. In addition to its existing catalog, Music Minus One has added important titles like its collection of Beethoven's ten violin sonatas, recorded by Mario Hossen, who selected the pianist, Sung-Suk Kang, a student of Viennese classicist Paul Badura-Skoda, and edited the score "based on tradition."

JoAnn Falletta, music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, tells me

COURTESY OF PHILLIPWSERNA.COM; SAM STADLEN; NICK WHITE; MIRO QUARTET: NAOYA IKEGAMI FOR SUNTORY HALL

that many of her friends "have used Music Minus One and loved it." She does not herself, she says, because she "was concentrating on classical guitar."

Cellist John Walz says he used an MMO recording once, back in the '70s, as he was preparing for one of his "earlier performances of the Schumann Concerto. The last movement of that piece is very fragmented and difficult to memorize," he tells me, "so I used to drill it with the LP, mainly for memory. It was very helpful."

Cellist Alban Gerhardt found it useful for a different reason. "I played a couple of times along with the LP of the Dvořák Cello Concerto in the '80s. It was not an easy task, as they followed the awful traditions the poor piece is filled with. But it helped me to be flexible," he admits, "when later I had to play with real orchestras—and not such good conductors."

The new frontier in this play-along technology is represented in part by two viola de gamba players, Phillip W. Serna near Chicago and Sam Stadlen in the UK, who since COVID lockdowns began have developed vigorous, forward-looking sites that demonstrate what virtual ensembles could be like.

Serna tells me that his Consorts-Minus-One project was "the outgrowth of a Kickstarter campaign focusing on contemporary music for viola da gamba by women composers. Having spent years performing all sorts of chamber music for viol consort meant I could record all of the parts."

When COVID struck, Serna had already been thinking about how he might use the many recordings he had already made as the basis for a music-minus-one project. "The pandemic made me see the potential niche market for early-music play-along recordings while so many were in lockdown at home and unable to gather together."

Serna's catalog spans the vast range of the consort repertoire including Leonora Duarte ("the only currently known woman composer of viol consort music"), Gibbons, Ferrabosco, Hume, Ortiz, Picforth, Poynt, Purcell, Tomkins, and even, on a technicality, Mozart. "It was his entry application into the Accademia Filarmonica di Bologna, on which Mozart was tasked to write a piece in the style of Palestrina," Serna explains. "I think it sounds gorgeous on viols rather than a modern string quartet."

Sam Stadlen's Music-Minus-One site ("Play Consort Music While Home Alone"), contains tutorials, music scores, parts, audio files, and videos that include recordings of famous viol ensemble music with Stadlen playing all the parts, minus one, which subscribers can then play themselves. A member of Fretwork and viol teacher at the Royal College of Music in London, Stadlen tells me that, in addition to being a gamba player, he is also a sound engineer and videographer, "so my subscribers benefit from my professional recording equipment and knowledge in this area."

> **"People can practice their parts with a professional player before they go and see their friends. And hopefully then play better when they're in their social situations."**
>
> ***—Sam Stadlen***

After abruptly ending a Canadian tour with his LSJ Trio, with violinist Paul Luchkow and fortepianist Michael Jarvis, Stadlen returned to the UK and found himself faced "with being unemployed essentially. I started the service with about six or seven pieces available and that quickly took off as I spent all my time recording more and more stuff. I remember saying to my wife early in the process, 'Can you imagine if I had ten subscribers? I'd be able to pay my mobile phone bills.' Now I've got a hundred subscribers and it's replaced my income, which is great."

Stadlen designed his service for viol players "as a practice tool so that people can practice their parts with a professional player before they go and see their friends. And hopefully they play better when they're in their social situations." He offers nearly 100 pieces by Couperin, Dowland, Gibbons, Jenkins, Lawes, Purcell, and others, plus a beginners' section. The tutorial videos are published free of charge on Stadlen's public YouTube channel. The recording collection, however, which includes all scores and parts, "is exclusive to subscribers. All recordings are available at both A415Hz and A440Hz, and video can be played back at 50- and 70-percent speed to aid practice."

Serna initially included recordings only at A415 but soon added recordings at A440 for those who play modern string instruments and not viols. The majority of works he includes link to published editions for purchase as well as the International Music Score Library Project/Petrucci Music Library.

Both viol entrepreneurs had user-friendliness in mind when designing their services. Serna wanted to make sure that all users needed was a smartphone, a good set of earbuds or headphones, and an instrument. People have been telling Stadlen that they're using their iPads, some with sound systems.

Joshua Gindele's Miró Quartet had an actual encounter with how this new technology might be developing. "We were working with a company to do something similar. We had our audio engineer take one of our Beethoven recordings and drop one part out so that you could play with the group, so if we dropped the cello part I could play with the group as I would normally do, but audio only. Then we thought it might be fun if we did something like that for people just to mess around with, where we would publish them online through social media or something and invite people able to play the missing tracks, and even post recordings of themselves playing with us."

Gindele points out that there were definitely people in the pop world doing that too, where they would record a track and say, "'Go ahead and improvise.' It was less structured than Schubert or Mozart. But there were some people doing it very effectively during the early part of the pandemic, and I thought, 'Oh, that's actually pretty cool.'" ■

5 MINUTES WITH . . . RANAAN MEYER

By Caeli Smith

Ranaan Meyer, bassist of genre-blending ensemble Time for Three, has run the Wabass Institute for 13 seasons. Now he is the artistic director of the new Honeywell Arts Academy, which launches in the summer of 2021 with three full-scholarship programs: Wabass, for bassists; Soundboard, for pianists; and Resonance, for unconventional musicians in pre-formed ensembles.

Ranaan Meyer

COURTESY OF RANAAN MEYER

Tell me about Honeywell.

Honeywell Arts Academy is a full-scholarship program based on the philosophy of "sharing of knowledge." We want to give attendees a well-rounded experience that includes respecting tradition, living in the present, and looking to the future.

Because we're lucky enough to be completely merit-based, we attract a high caliber of musician. A lot of our Wabass alums are in leadership roles now. Ten years down the road, our current Honeywell attendees will also be in leadership roles. They will be proof that you can no longer just show up for work and play your instrument well. There's so much evidence of that, even at the highest levels. Our responsibility as educators is to show people that they have more professional options than they thought. We focus on the essentials of entrepreneurial visions and pioneering careers.

What is the philosophy behind the "sharing of knowledge"?

Sharing of knowledge is what we call the spirit of everyone helping each other, everyone empowering each other, teachers and students alike. All ideas are welcome! As a student, I had the luxury of teachers who empowered and uplifted me. They made me feel like I could conquer the world. There's an old school of teaching where teachers break you down and build you back up. For some people that works really well. But that's not what this is. When an environment is set up in a certain way, any barriers are lifted pretty fast. This mindset is so crucial for education. When you're able to nurture in a really positive way, it can sort of give students a push.

Wabass is the biggest learning week of my year. We're all students in the program. Every summer, I know I'm going to be blown away. And for the rest of the year I'm thinking about everything we learned together.

Resonance is the program for "unconventional musicians." The faculty [including Meyer and his Time for Three violinist colleagues Nick Kendall and Charles Yang, and pianist Peter Dugan, host of *From the Top*] have demonstrated real innovation in their own careers.

We've assembled a team where everyone uplifts each other. We're trying to look deeply into who they are as humans. There are certain feelings you get from people when they perform. I'm the artistic director, but it's not mine! We all collaborate to make these ideals happen. Each program will be different, but everyone on the faculty is very open-minded. Their experiential knowledge has shown that.

What are you looking for in Resonance applicants?

Classical musicians sometimes feel that there's a special air of sophistication to their musical output. To me, the quality of music, no matter what the style, is tied to an element of sophistication. For example, Béla Fleck isn't classical at all — but there's something very sophisticated about his music.

For Resonance, we're looking for people who not only want to be extraordinary performers, but who want to do a lot for the world. We really need programs that encourage that sort of thing. Our participants could

be a high-level band, like a trio or a quintet, that has already been gigging professionally. Or maybe there's a violinist who is dabbling with writing music, who improvises a little bit and sings. Maybe he or she has been focusing on auditioning for orchestras, but is curious about hearing and discovering other things. We're looking for people who are really focused, really creative. Some of them may be "switch hitters"—musicians who are into both jazz and into classical, for example.

Improv is an important feature of Wabass. What would you say to someone who might be nervous about improvising?

There are five factors that are essential to music making: the written page, interpretation, spontaneity, improvisation, and complete freedom. Spontaneity is at the apex. But how do you achieve spontaneity? You need all of those other factors. It's limiting to tell yourself that you're not going to try one of those things.

> "I want everyone to leave with tools they can use to springboard their careers."

What will a day at Resonance look like?

One thing that makes the program so exciting is that it's not specific. Resonance is for anyone who wants to be a pioneer within music. That can mean a lot of different things. The design of that week will very much be determined by the people that are selected to attend. It's all about them. We want to know what they want to work on. We're working for you. We're here to help you be the best you can be.

I want everyone to leave with tools they can use to springboard their careers. That's a high expectation—but it happens! It has happened at Wabass. Some of the players are ready, and they don't know it yet. They need fertilizer, water, and sunlight. Something happens, it could just be a change of scenery. We're lucky, because we are the change of scenery.

Honeywell takes place in Wabash, Indiana, a fairly rural community. How does the program fit into the landscape?

The community really embraces our artists. We have a partnership with Eskenazi Hospital in Indianapolis, and they have a Healing Arts department. We won't be able to go in-person this summer, but we are planning for an outdoor concert that will be streamed inside the hospital. It's special to play in places like Carnegie Hall. But when I play for people who need it the most, that's when I've been impacted the most. That sense of charity as a musician should be a crucial thing in our professional DNA. Musicians are superheroes! It just depends how you want to use that. We're all ambassadors who can spread good. It can be a life-changing thing. ■

BRING THE MASTERS TO YOUR PRACTICE SESSIONS

Every recorded interpretation of J.S. Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G major provides a valuable lesson

By Brian Forst

Brian Forst

JUDITH FORST

Bach's Cello Suites, BWV 1007–1012, are the perfect medicine for cellists trying to cope during the pandemic. They offer challenges for even the most accomplished musician, and some of the pieces provide accessible playing opportunities for amateurs too. I play the Prelude to the Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007, several times daily, usually after listening to a recording by a master. This daily exercise teaches me cello. The G major Prelude is a masterpiece of musical expression, with limitless opportunities for interpretation.

Of course, to play this or any other piece well, you must first learn to play the notes on the score as accurately and cleanly as you can. Then it is time to find your voice. Both of these stages can be informed by listening to master musicians. Surveying recorded versions by renowned cellists reveals myriad interpretations of the Bach suites—never mind versions on viola, violin, bass, guitar, piano, and clarinet. Variations are apparent as well in different recordings by the same cellist—Yo-Yo Ma has three versions; Janos Starker, Anner Bylsma, Matt Haimovitz, and Pieter Wispelwey two each. Some cellists play it in Baroque style, others in modern; some slowly, a few at warp speed. Jaap ter Linden, on his 1997 recording, plays the G major Prelude deliberately, in 3:18; Heinrich Schiff, on his 1985 disc, knocks it off in 1:52.

Some play it with precise tick-tock cadence, as if conducted by metronome, like Paul Tortelier (1960). Others—like Mischa Maisky (1985), Gavriel Lipkind (2006), Steven Isserlis (2007), and Zuill Bailey (2010)—perform it with exquisite, creative phrasing. Given the vast range of options, it should not be surprising that the recorded variations of the Bach Cello Suites are about as numerous, expansive, and expressive as the recordings of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," written over 250 years later—even in an era when popular-music audiences vastly outnumber those for classical music.

These many interpretations help to unlock the mysteries of the music. The rich opportunity to find one's own interpretation is

available in no small part because no copy of the score exists written in Bach's hand. Bowing and phrasing options are mostly up to the performer. It is a blueprint with blurred lines.

I learned to play the Prelude by following Pierre Fournier's edition and listening to my teacher. But I learned it no less listening to the masters. You can too. Listen to Fournier's recording and then play the Prelude thinking about his elegant way of making each note clearly heard. Listen to Jacqueline du Pré's version and then aim to play it with raw authenticity. Listen to Mstislav Rostropovich and then play it informed by his sense of urgency and impatient authority. Listen to Janos Starker and then play the piece emulating his unique call-echo phrasing in the opening passages. Listen to Yo-Yo Ma and then play it with joy and exuberance. Listen to Truls Mørk and then emulate his quiet, contemplative approach. Listen to Richard Narroway and then aim for the air of sweet melancholy he creates. Listen to Alisa Weilerstein and then try to capture the sublime delicacy of her performance. Listen and learn.

All the great performers of this work share one thing at least: each is a storyteller. And the G major Prelude is a sweet, beautiful musical story. Bach crafted it with complete sentences and paragraphs. Each of the masters delivers it with his or her unique voice.

You can bring these and other cello icons into your daily practice routine. You may not match the agility, technical skill, and sound quality you hear from the masters, but you can be informed and inspired by the extraordinary range of possibilities they demonstrate. As you find your own voice and interpretation—your own way of telling the story—your technique and approach are bound to improve along the way, not only in playing this magnificent work, but in everything else you play and do as well.

Brian Forst is professor emeritus at the American University School of Public Affairs. He is author of nine books, most recently Life on the Other Side: Fifty Things Learned in Retirement *(Balboa Press, 2020). He lives in Reston, Virginia.*

> "The recorded variations of the Bach Cello Suites are about as numerous, expansive, and expressive as the recordings of Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah.'"

Hilary Hahn

DANA VAN LEEUWEN / DECCA

feel THE FORCE

Violinist **Hilary Hahn** comes out of a year's sabbatical with a new album, a role in exploring AI and the arts, and a solo project that tips its hat to a galaxy far, far away

By Inge Kjemtrup

Wearing a light blue coat with the hood up, Hilary Hahn trudges through a chilly late-November landscape. She is filming herself as she walks, making an update to her many fans via social media. "I'm doing my best to keep working in my own way," she says. "I remain optimistic about when things will begin again."

Days after she filmed this wintry wander, Hahn turned 41. The birthday was marked in quarantine, following her return from a carefully planned live performance in Texas—the first since her sabbatical ended in September. When I spoke with Hahn via Zoom in early December, she shared her thoughts on her sabbatical and her new projects. She has many reflections, too, about the changes that the pandemic has wrought on the world, the musical world in particular.

Hahn has been in the spotlight since she was a teenager. The violinist is admired for her gorgeous tone, flawless technique, and unparalleled ability to bring along her audience as she pushes the boundaries of what and where a world-class violinist is allowed to do and go (that includes expertly hula-hooping while playing violin along with internet stars TwoSet Violin).

She marks her return with a new CD, *Paris*, recorded with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France under its music director, Mikko Franck. The album "shows pretty much the landscape of who I am as a musician: emotionally, historically within my career, forward-looking. It's important for me to be always thinking to the future, but I'm grounded in tradition," she says.

That future includes a new music and artificial-intelligence project. And then there's "Hahn Solo." More about that later.

The sabbatical had been long planned. "The way I approach my career, I've always built in, I wouldn't say down time, but sort of re-centering time," she explains. "I've always tried to either take summers off or take chunks of time." Hahn took a six-month sabbatical at age 30. With children aged two-and-a-half-months and five-years old, she took off the entire 2019/20 season.

"The purpose of the sabbatical is to learn about who I really am and what my priorities really are in order to be the best person and musician I can be going forward. It's

OJ SLAUGHTER

good to reassess those things intentionally from time to time, whether it's for an hour or for a year. That actually wound up being amplified in the course of figuring out how to live in this new landscape [of the pandemic]."

She returned in September to a musical environment filled with shuttered concert halls, canceled seasons, underemployed musicians, and recordings out of the question.

Still, there were a few opportunities to collaborate, and, so, after careful thought, Hahn traveled to Dallas for a women-in-music symposium, where she was given an award. While in Texas she played a COVID-safe performance of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 with longtime musical partners the Houston Symphony and conductor Marin Alsop. (This concert was also livestreamed.)

The concert marked the end of the longest span Hahn has spent away from performing in public since early childhood. The experience of playing, and in such challenging circumstances, was life-affirming, she says. "When the performance energy is there, I am really completely in my element. It was great to be in that element again, feel that energy, know it's there.

"It was there so immediately for everyone that I don't doubt that when everything resumes on a more normal schedule, things will kick back into place. There will be logistical challenges. There will be financial challenges. There will be things to sort out, but the musical impetus and the appreciation for working together will be very strong."

During her sabbatical, Hahn—whose #100daysofpractice posts on social media helped jumpstart many routines—didn't let up on the practicing. She also launched a solo project "Hahn Solo." I figured the project must have been conceived during quarantine? She laughs at the suggestion. "No, it started before the pandemic."

"It's a great name," I say to cover my cluelessness.

"I credit the fans with that," she replies. "They've been trying to make Hahn Solo happen for a really long time. And I was like, let's do it! But the idea of the project was mine."

The idea was sparked at a post-concert event at a club in Lyon, France, with conductor Leonard Slatkin. But what would a conductor do without the orchestra in a performance, in a club? The answer was that Slatkin conducted the audience. "One half of the audience was doing one rhythm and the other was doing another part while I was playing the solo and he was conducting them. It was really fun!

"I have always been curious what it would be like for an audience to hear the solo part [on its own]." As a soloist learning a part, she says, you can see the genius of a composer's writing for the solo voice. So to perform the part on its own "is very exposed. You have to be pretty confident, but as part of the musical experience, it brings the audience into the practice room, in a sense."

> "Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1 is a very important piece to me—it's one of my calling-card pieces and I've been playing it since I was a teenager."

You can find the Hahn Solo posts, including the Sibelius Violin Concerto, Op. 47, recorded one hour before she stepped in front of an orchestra to play the same piece, on Hahn's YouTube channel. There's a Mozart Concerto No. 5, too. Other Hahn Solo adventures "will happen as they happen," she says.

Hahn's new album, *Paris*, was recorded during her 2018/19 season residency with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

The mood of the CD is, like her winter walk, reflective, and the liner notes describe Hahn's joyous connection to Paris, which began when she was on tour in the city in her teens. At the heart of the CD is the late Einojuhani Rautavaara's poignant final work, *Deux Sérénades*, dedicated to Hahn. The serenades nearly didn't see the light of day. Hahn admired Rautavaara's music and had commissioned him for her encore album, *In 27 Pieces*. She also performed his mysterious, swirling Violin Concerto. Could music director Franck, a long-time Rautavaara champion, persuade him write another violin concerto?

Rautavaara turned down the concerto idea but told Franck he would love to write some serenades. There was no further news until the great Finnish composer, who had been ailing for some time, died in 2016. Hahn figured that was that.

But not so. "At the wake, Rautavaara's widow took Mikko into the study and showed him this score," Hahn says. "Mikko knew immediately it was our piece." The violin parts were completed and the orchestration nearly so (Rautavaara's student Kalevi Aho finished the orchestration). The serenades, "Pour la vie" and "Pour mon amour," are in Rautavaara's characteristic dark and lyrical language. Hahn sees similarities to the sound world of Samuel Barber's Violin Concerto, Op. 14.

With the Philharmonique and Franck, Hahn gave the world premiere in February 2019. "Mikko held the score up to the heavens when we finished. That was the acknowledgement to the composer. It was a really big moment. We were completing a catalog and we were completing someone's life work."

The Rautavaara is bookended on the CD by Chausson's Poème and Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1. Hahn had wanted to record the Prokofiev for a long time but hadn't quite found the right musical forces. "It's a very important piece to me—it's one of my calling-card pieces and I've been playing it since I was a teenager. There's a vibrancy to the color in this piece that requires a combination of brutality and finesse." In the Philharmonique, she found the ideal collaborators.

She sees the Prokofiev concerto, premiered when the Russian was living in Paris, as an essentially French piece. "To me, it is him, but him and France." This cross-cultural quality was well captured by the Philharmonique. "One thing I appreciate about their playing is they sound French in their variety of tone color and their comfort navigating the nuances of expression, but they play very straightforwardly."

Written in 1896, Chausson's *Poème* was given its Paris premiere in April 1897 by the Belgian virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe, the work's

dedicatee. "I love Chausson's *Poème*," Hahn says. "When I thought about playing Chausson with [the Philharmonique], I could hear it in my head. I knew what that would be and I knew I couldn't go another year without doing it. I have to do this with this orchestra and this conductor."

Our conversation moves from the new CD to Hahn's role with Deepmusic.ai, an organization formed to explore artificial intelligence (AI) and the arts. She is the co-founder (and VP of artistic partnerships), along with tech entrepreneur Carol Reiley. The company's mission statement describes its goal: "to use music as a lens on how humans and AI can co-create something special together."

"We're trying to figure out what's the state-of-the-art, what are the issues?" Hahn says. "AI is here. So it's not like, do we want to engage with it or not? It's like, are we going to have our voices heard? Are we going to take a place at the table? Are we going to be influential as artists? Or are we just going to let other fields determine what art is going to be in the future? We need to find ways to fill those gaps and also get the two areas talking to each other, finding our commonalities, identifying the challenges, finding things that aren't working, providing tutorials on using the AI software that currently exists."

Deepmusic.ai launched in December 2020 with an event featuring three composers working with AI software. Composer David Lang wrote "out of body" for Hahn. Lang says, "I'm proud to say I did not cheat at all in that I laid all the computer notes into my original piece in the order it was generated. It is true, however, that the AI generated many options, and I chose only the one that was most aesthetically pleasing to me. I never asked myself which option was aesthetically pleasing to it."

Shifting gears from the digital to fully human, Hahn and I talk about her occasional concerts for babies and their caregivers at major concert venues. She loves it. "You see the cultural patterns of parenting and

dressing up the babies and how people interact with their children, how they interact with each other. It's really fascinating, culturally. In Paris, one kid army-crawled to the front, looking up at me, and saw the entire performance from two feet away. And I was like, 'Wow, this kid loves music. This kid might become a violinist!'"

As the world enters its second year of the pandemic, there's a light at the end of the tunnel with the arrival of the vaccines. Yet for musicians the world over, big questions remain: When will they and their audiences safely return to normal? What will "normal" even look like? Hahn has given this some thought.

"There have been a lot of statements that art is necessary or crucial to the human condition. I think everyone in this time has

> "We're trying to figure out what's the state-of-the-art, what are the issues?"

developed their own certainty about what they need out of art. We've all gone through these tests of our commitment.

"I turned 40 during my sabbatical. I just turned 41. I'm very aware that I'm in my prime as a performer. As an artist, I'm gaining more and more respect and I have more and more choice. I get to choose my priorities a little bit more with every year that I perform.

"And it happens with a lot of people that the older you get, the more you understand yourself, the more you understand your art, and the more other people understand you in that context. So I'm really thinking a lot about that: What is it we need to create for the next generation so that things are better and so that they can continue making things better for everyone who has a beautiful voice that should be heard in the arts?" And as her musings wander into a hopeful future, we end our talk. ■

Multi-CULTURAL ODES

Composer, violinist, and educator Jessie Montgomery is a nonstop force

By Thomas May

An unmistakable harmony holds sway in Jessie Montgomery's creative work. Her attunement to larger cultural contexts is eloquent and persuasive. Take *Banner*, Montgomery's contribution to the tributes marking the U.S. National Anthem's bicentennial in 2014. A compact, powerful piece for string quartet and string (or chamber) orchestra, *Banner* confronts what she calls "the contradictions, leaps and bounds, and milestones that allow us to celebrate and maintain the tradition of our ideals."

Montgomery's bold sonorities challenge the anthem. They pressure it into unprecedented polyphonies of "American folk and protest songs and anthems from around the world . . . to create a musical melting pot," as *New York Times* critic Anthony Tommasini remarked. The result is a multicultural ode—her generation's equivalent of Jimi Hendrix's incandescent interpretation of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (whether in its original version or as retrofitted to the string-quartet literature by Kronos).

Here and elsewhere in her growing body of compositions, Montgomery manages to project a distinctly individual voice while at the same time drawing effortlessly on wildly varying registers and influences that, with less imaginative musicians, might come across as rambling eclecticism. Her conviction of music's social significance reinforces rather than obscures a personal vision.

"A lot of artists were leading community-development initiatives in the neighborhood. I got to witness their sense of responsibility to maintain our community and to be in solidarity with one another," Montgomery says of her childhood in a recent Zoom interview from her home in Greenwich Village. "I would go to a lot of events and shows and gallery openings with my parents back then."

This is how Montgomery, a native New Yorker born in 1981, recalls her upbringing in Manhattan's Lower East Side. It was an exciting crucible for artistic experimentation during her childhood there in the 1980s and early '90s. As the daughter of artist parents in a mixed-race marriage, she had access to a view from inside the action. Her mother is the Obie Award–winning playwright, actor, and teacher Robbie McCauley, a distinguished figure in the American avant-garde theater scene. Ed Montgomery, her father, is himself a composer, jazz musician, and indie filmmaker. (With the Sedition Ensemble, the couple has collaborated on such projects as the jazz opera *Congo New York*.)

"I was exposed to a lot of art as a kid," Montgomery says—in particular, art of an avant-garde nature

JIYANG CHEN

made by people eager to question norms and test boundaries. "At the same time, I was studying violin on a traditional track." She started taking lessons at the age of four at the Third Street Music School Settlement, the legendary community music school founded in 1894 to support the underprivileged children of the Lower East Side's polyglot immigrant population; since last fall she has served on its board of directors. So, from a very young age, Montgomery experienced firsthand the excitement of blending musical genres and philosophies that convention had otherwise deemed somehow incompatible.

Of her influences, Montgomery notes that "my basis and technique are really rooted in European tradition. Some of my favorite composers are Bartók, Debussy, and Britten; later, I started getting into more contemporary music, like Varèse. But I was surrounded by experimental music all the time while I was studying rigid European music—not that the music itself is rigid, but the pedagogy of it is rigid. I listened to a lot of indie pop and alt rock in high school. And I always considered myself a big consumer of jazz, though I never studied it. I grew up seeing free jazz musicians regularly, like Butch Morris, Willie Parker, violinist Billy Bang—they were part of my home life."

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The Way of Improvisation

Small wonder that bridging different worlds comes naturally to this musician. Montgomery channels her seemingly tireless creative drive into her work as composer, violinist, teacher, and curator, gracefully shifting between and sometimes amalgamating these roles. For example, she incorporates the improvisational approach that is a signature of her playing style into her teaching practice. Her model is the work of Alice Kanack, the innovative pedagogue who studied with Shinichi Suzuki and became a formative influence on Montgomery during her time at the Third Street Music School Settlement.

Regarding the method Kanack used when she was a student, which is known as Creative Ability Development, Montgomery explains: "It's based on exercises using many repetitions, within which there are options for improvising various musical choices. This was always done in a group setting, where players would improvise these structures. This prepped me well for ensemble playing." Montgomery regularly performs with such organizations as Silkroad and the Sphinx Virtuosi and is an avid chamber musician: she cofounded the PUBLIQuartet in 2010 and is a member of the Catalyst Quartet.

In fact, it was her violin classes with Kanack that initially kindled Montgomery's interest in composing. "I had been practicing improvising a lot," she says. "Alice suggested I start composing as a way to continue that side of my musical studies, so I began writing my own music around age ten or 11." The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center lauded her with two Composer's Apprentice Awards in high school. For the digital season now underway, CMSLC chose Montgomery as one of the composers being highlighted in its New Milestones series: a concert stream on March 11 includes her Duo for Violin and Cello from 2018. The performers, violinist Benjamin Beilman and cellist Nicholas Canellakis, join the composer for a livestream conversation about her work on March 8.

"Jessie's obviously a wonderful violinist herself. She writes so effectively for the instrument, which I found from playing her Rhapsody No. 1 for solo violin," Benjamin Beilman says in an interview after recording Duo in preparation for the stream. "While there aren't any explicitly improvisational passages in Duo, there has to be a dialogue with the cello that does resemble the spirit of improvisation. The violin bounces off whatever choices my colleague has made."

Duo partakes of the improvisatory spirit that is a cornerstone of Montgomery's practice—but that it does so within the framework of a three-movement chamber piece likewise informed by classical tradition enhances its fascination. Montgomery originally wrote Duo in 2015 for herself and cellist Adrienne Taylor. "It's an ode to friendship that is meant to be fun and whimsical, representing a range of shared experiences with friends." Montgomery recently gave the movements names ("Antics," "In Confidence," "Serious Fun") that hint at this emotional arc of a friendship, alongside the

camaraderie required to play chamber music honestly and engagingly.

"I have several pieces with open sections that call for improvisation," she says. "Some of my compositions, like my solo violin pieces, can and should be played with an improvisatory attitude. Whenever I get questions about what speed to take or how to phrase a passage, I always end up saying: 'This is your piece now. The tempos are what I think needs to happen for the music to feel coherent, but I write it in a way that I hope gives an elasticity for you to make it your own.' Duo needs to have that flexibility."

Combining Creativity and Social Justice

While an undergraduate at Juilliard, Montgomery shifted her focus to violin performance. "But in the course of my junior year, I began writing again on my own, outside school, and was composing pieces for colleagues after I graduated." She then worked for half a decade at the MusicWorks Collective in Providence, Rhode Island, where she focused on her interest in music as a vehicle for social justice, writing pieces for the students and for her own chamber group.

All of this activity, Montgomery says, "cascaded into my first real commission": *Strum* for string quartet or quintet, which is also available in a version for string orchestra. Initially written for Community MusicWorks and premiered in 2006, it was revised in 2012 on a commission from the Sphinx Organization. Along with her chamber compositons, Montgomery's catalog to date includes songs, orchestral pieces, and film music—the last category reflecting her graduate studies at New York University's film scoring program. "I enjoy that application of story or narrative to help me find structure for my piece," she remarks. "And it's a fun way to do research and find historical and or musical references that might be relevant to what I'm trying to discover."

Montgomery believes that her work as a touring performer and educator has kept her from being closed in by silo thinking as a composer—"which can happen a lot in classical music. I'm able to get myself out in the world, often playing my own pieces with quartets. I think that helped getting the wheels turning early on."

The Sphinx Organization, with which she has been affiliated since the late 1990s, is a longstanding anchor for Montgomery's social-justice concerns. One of the most powerful advocates at work today for diversity in the arts, Sphinx named her composer-in-residence with its professional touring ensemble, the Sphinx Virtuosi, and, in 2015, awarded her a grant for her debut album, which includes *Strum*—by now one of her signature pieces—as the title track.

Strum: Music for Strings (Azica Records) is a collection of Montgomery's music for strings. In essence, the album seamlessly braids together several aspects of her artistic practice. It demonstrates her work as both composer and performer; her fluent command of classical language, of the vernacular idioms of African American spirituals and folk music, and of the intersectional potential of the string quartet; and her engagement with social justice.

> "I feel that my social-justice commitment is most present when I'm working with students and talking about what their futures might look like."
>
> —Jessie Montgomery

Of the last-mentioned aspect, Montgomery elaborates: "I feel that my social-justice commitment is most present when I'm working with students and talking about what their futures might look like—in the way I discuss their self-leadership and advocacy for their own work and artistic voice. In addition, just being an African American person and writing music that references these traditions can fall under the realm of social justice in that it's acknowledging the contributions of oppressed peoples and making sure that audiences are remembering and recognizing the importance of those contributions." And her work as an artistic board member for several organizations, she adds, creates "yet another opportunity to reach a larger field and make an impact."

Expanding Her Vision

A recent project in which these goals also intersect was to have had its premiere last spring: a "musical reimagining" with Jannina Norpoth of Scott Joplin's 1911 opera *Treemonisha*, the first opera by a Black artist about life in the aftermath of slavery. It was produced by Volcano Theatre and co-commissioned by Washington Performing Arts, Stanford University, Southbank Centre (London), National Arts Centre (Ottawa), and the Banff Centre for the Arts.

The reanimated, freshly adapted *Scott Joplin's Treemonisha* became one of several casualties of the pandemic, during a season that would have seen numerous premieres of Montgomery's work. When it does premiere, it will represent her first operatic collaboration. Montgomery is also eagerly awaiting the completion of a new song cycle for soprano Julia Bullock, who premiered her *Five Slave Songs* as part of Bullock's 2018–19 residency at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

A nonet for winds and strings titled *Sergeant McCauley* (2019) and commissioned by Music Accord for Imani Winds and Catalyst Quartet similarly fuses Montgomery's flair for blending genres—neatly mirrored in the mixture of timbres and registers—with a natural gift for storytelling. Already in demand to compose dance music, Montgomery is preparing to make her debut as an original opera composer (alongside the *Treemonisha* project). The opera shares its title with that of the nonet and is based on the experiences of the composer's great-grandfather, who was a Buffalo Soldier (with the 10th Cavalry Regiment of the U.S. Army).

"The Buffalo Soldiers were also simultaneously participating in the Great Migration," she explains. "I'm charting his path during that time in the early 1900s, trying to find songs—spirituals and/or other folk songs from the regions of America he traveled in—to use as anchors for moments in the opera. I like that multidimensional way of looking at a piece." ■

Tessa Lark

LAUREN DESBERG

THE 'GRASS IS SOMETIMES GREENER

Violinist Tessa Lark has forged a career steeped in both classical and bluegrass traditions

By Brian Wise

The goal was to highlight two top-flight string players from two generations, collaborating at the nexus of two rather different genres. But when a UK radio station posted a video on Facebook of violinist Tessa Lark and bassist Edgar Meyer playing Meyer's "Concert Duo for Violin and Double Bass," opinions were divided. While a majority of commenters reacted favorably, a few pounced on the headline: "Bluegrass on a Strad."

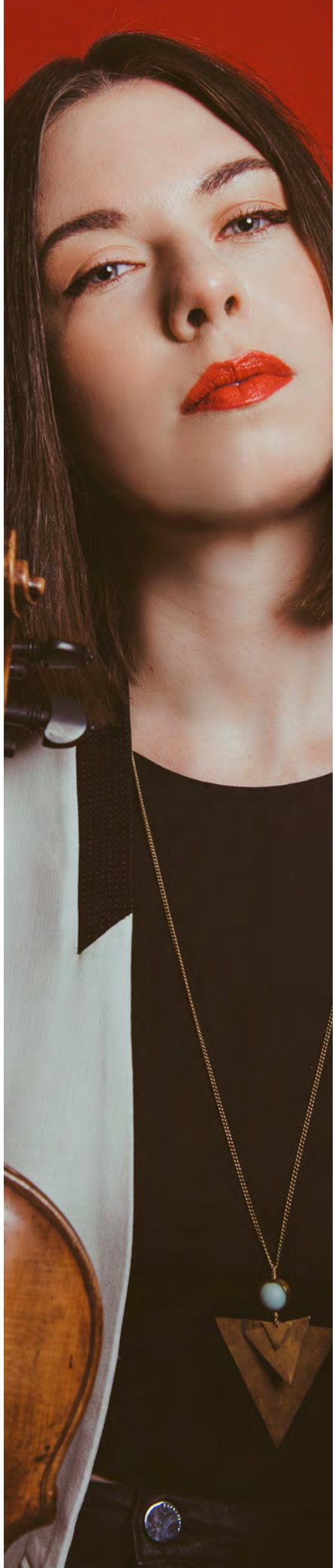
"This is not bluegrass," read one comment, but "an elitist's rendition of bluegrass." Another insisted that the music called for "the wail of a fiddle"—not a Stradivari. Still others found the performance to be too crisply executed to meet their ideal for the genre.

"What made me sad is that these people, in seemingly defending bluegrass, were implying that high quality is not part of it," a faintly exasperated Lark says in a phone interview from her home in New York City. "In fact, it is very complex." Putting aside the fact that Meyer's Concert Duo is not strictly a bluegrass tune, the Kentucky-born Lark bristled at the negative commentary about instrument choice.

"Bluegrass musicians deserve to play Strads just as much as classical musicians do," she says, noting that the performance actually featured a G.P. Maggini violin, on loan from the Stradivari Society of Chicago. "[Bluegrass musicians'] accuracy is absolutely phenomenal and their ability to navigate different musical worlds is incredibly nuanced." She adds, "If somebody prefers bluegrass music over classical music, it doesn't mean they have lesser taste in music."

The finale from the Concert Duo was an advanced single from *The Stradgrass Sessions*, a collection of folk-inflected pieces performed by Lark and several luminaries from the spheres of jazz and Appalachian music, including pianist Jon Batiste, mandolinist Sierra Hull, and fiddler Michael Cleveland. Completed amid the global tumult of 2020 and due out this spring, the recording puts a sharper focus on what has been an active sideline for Lark.

"Over the years, 'Stradgrass' has come to mean living and exploring distant violinistic styles through a classical lens," she explains. The term was coined in 2015 by bassist Michael Thurber, her duo partner and now fiancé, after she began performing bluegrass tunes on the 1683 "Martinelli, Gingold" Stradivari violin (provided to her on a short-term loan that ended in 2018).



LAUREN DESBERG

As Lark has honed the Stradgrass concept—composing the jaunty *Appalachian Fantasy* (featured in a 2017 Strings Session) and improvising fiddle tunes as encores—it has become a catchall for other projects. Last July, she presented a video master class for Nicola Benedetti's Benedetti Foundation, in which she walked viewers through bluegrass techniques including chopping (crunchy off-beat rhythms), drones, and slides ("be a little lazy with your left-hand fingers," she told viewers). Vibrato, she advised, should be used sparingly, perhaps only in the "high lonesome moments" of a fiddle tune.

Roots in Bluegrass Country

Born Tessa Lark Frederick and raised in the central Kentucky town of Richmond, Lark has been playing classical and improvised music for much of her 31 years. She took up the mandolin at age four, followed by the violin some two years later. By age nine, she was occasionally joining her father, a biology professor and banjo picker, in Narrow Road, a gospel-bluegrass band (she plays fiddle on the group's first CD).

At age 11, Lark started commuting to Cincinnati on Saturdays for the Starling Preparatory Strings Project, a training program led by Kurt Sassmannshaus. "I would always start every drive with *Appalachian Journey* and Edgar Meyer's piece *1B*," she says, referring to the folk-classical crossover album that featured Meyer along with Yo-Yo Ma and Mark O'Connor. "That was my soundtrack to going off on my musical journeys."

With its mix of delicate fiddle melodies and elaborate arrangements, *Appalachian Journey* offered a model of sorts for Lark. In her teens she spent several summers at the Mark O'Connor Fiddle Camp, where she learned the rudiments of jazz from fiddlers like Sara Caswell and Christian Howes. "I was so taken with it," she says. "I love the idea of crafting your own solos over music. That potential for more freedom was very appealing to me."

Lark studied classical violin at the New England Conservatory, followed by the Juilliard School, during which time she entered several competitions and took second prize at the 2014 International Violin

Competition of Indianapolis. An Avery Fisher Career Grant followed in 2016. She also took courses in improvisation and performed with school jazz ensembles. While Lark treats fiddling with an intellectual rigor, she also admires its open-ended, egalitarian spirit.

"There are so many tunes out there that are composed in such a way that the most advanced player and the most beginner player can play them together at the same time," she says. "You must get to know the playing of the masters and get to understand and be part of a culture. But it is open to absolutely anybody."

A turning point came in 2019 when Lark was invited to perform with Meyer at the Musica Viva Festival in Sydney, Australia. The bassist praises the rhythmic precision she brings to his Concert Duo, with its zigzagging melodies and rapid-fire passages. "I think that her appreciation of rhythmically based music helped her understand what I meant when I asked for a tighter window than would be routine within classical music," Meyer says in an e-mail exchange. "A person living entirely within classical music might not be aware of the higher rhythmic standard that exists in some pockets of other music."

Lark and Meyer are expected to record his string trios in Nashville this year, joined by cellist Joshua Roman.

Among the other songs planned for *The Stradgrass Sessions* is a rendition of Stephen Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home," recorded with Batiste, who, long before his current stint as Stephen Colbert's bandleader, was a Juilliard roommate of Thurber, Lark's bassist fiancé. "We started playing [the tune] in F and had no formal plans for how it would go," she said of her first meeting with Batiste. "We just played it down and some of the first notes ended up being the track we chose for the CD."

Lark acknowledges that Foster's song—about an enslaved person being sold down the river—has a complicated history. "We're all sort of grappling with what history is and means and how accurate it is," Lark says. "The piece was anti-slavery and had a beautiful message of peace and community at the onset."

Learning by Ear

Another new collaborator is Sierra Hull, a noted bluegrass mandolinist whom Lark met at the 2020 Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow, Scotland. Because of the pandemic, the two women remotely recorded their parts to Hull's composition *Chasin' Skies* and three of Bartók's 44 Duets for Two Violins, Sz. 98. Recording engineer and producer Silas Brown stitched the parts together. "Her sense of groove and everything was just impeccable," Lark says of Hull, who learned her part of the Bartók duets by ear.

While Lark is accustomed to playing fiddle music by ear, she wears a classical hat in pieces like Michael Torke's *Sky*, a bluegrass-flavored violin concerto composed for her and the Albany Symphony (nominated for a Grammy Award in 2019). Similarly, John Corigliano's *STOMP,* a solo piece given its premiere recording on *The Stradgrass Sessions*, was modeled on bluegrass and jazz.

"Seeing that style written on a page is a little disorienting," she admits. "Sometimes there's an extra process that I have to go through to try and understand what the music is trying to convey. So I'll look at something slowly and then realize, 'Oh that's just this fiddling thing that I've done before and I've never seen written on a page.' Then, I'm locked in with my instincts."

Lark's manager, Marianne Sciolino, says that her freewheeling client has become less leery about conservative attitudes from the classical establishment. She points out that Lark was awarded a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2018 following a recommendation from pianist Mitsuko Uchida, a traditionalist whom Lark got to know at the Marlboro Music Festival (the £20,000 fellowship money has helped to fund Lark's recordings). And after a number of concert postponements and cancellations this season, a recital at London's Wigmore Hall is scheduled for fall 2021.

At the same time, Lark is mulling future moves, musical and otherwise. "There are all of these things pointing me to Nashville more and more," she muses when asked about the lure of Music City. "But I've never actually been to the city even though I have so many friends there. As much as we like being in New York, the idea of Nashville sounds really appealing."

No immediate move appears imminent. But at a time when the concert business has been nearly brought to a standstill, Lark and Thurber are weighing their priorities. "We really worked to keep as much work afloat as we could," she says. "We also made sure we took the time to reflect more inwardly, which musicians, if they aren't careful about it, don't have much time to do." She adds, "It's about what we can do to make the most meaningful impact with our music." ■

Panna
Czinka

A primer on Roma fiddling, and some of its greatest exponents

Tradition of Legends

By Sasha Margolis

There is much history between the Roma people and the violin. In the past, some—Roma and outsiders alike—have even speculated about a mystical connection. According to legend, in Transylvania, remote villagers once thought the secret to becoming a great *primás* (leader of a Roma band) entailed sleeping for six weeks with an egg under one's armpit, then rubbing its yolk on the violin's strings and uttering an incantation to summon the aid of dark powers. In this less superstitious era, the lightning-quick technique and soul-stirring pathos of a great Roma violinist can still seem otherworldly.

The Roma experience in Europe has been a difficult one, encompassing near-constant daily prejudice, centuries of enslavement in Romania, and mass death in the Holocaust. Music has been a bright spot. Hungarian Roma musicians, along with folk fiddlers of Romania and Sinti/Manouche jazz players (Roma sub-groups in Central and Western Europe) who carry forward the style of Manouche guitarist Django Reinhardt, all have gained levels of acceptance and even adulation from the population at large, while enjoying elite status within their own communities.

Magyar Nóta of Hungary

One of Hungary's most legendary violinists—in a land of legendary violinists—was a Roma woman, Panna Czinka (1711–72). Czinka's playing, tales tell, could make "the very stones shiver." Her bow "drew sparks." Upon her audience, she exerted a "magical force."

Czinka's enchanted listeners were Hungarian nobles, and much of what she performed was sophisticated music geared to noble tastes. Playing behind her was a band, formed after she married, that included her husband, brothers-in-law, and eventually, sons. With its instrumentation of violins, bass, and cimbalom, this is considered Hungary's first true Roma band—which made the beautiful, pipe-smoking, man's-uniform-wearing Czinka history's first *primás* (leader).

As a woman, Czinka was an anomaly among Roma *primáses*; almost all since have been men. But otherwise, she paved a precise path for her successors, achieving mythic status while playing for an ethnic Hungarian audience as part of a dynastic ensemble, in a repertoire neither quite classical nor folk, neither strictly Roma nor purely Hungarian.

In Hungary, this repertoire, known as *magyar nóta*, was long ago adopted as a national music. (It also inspired innumerable classical pieces in the Brahms *Hungarian Dance* vein.)

Certain elements of the *primáses'* art are easily appreciated: the rapid-fire coordination, the slides covering ample real estate, the soft-hearted but hot-blooded vibrato—and sometimes, a two-fingered vibrato called *kecskézés* (roughly, "goating"), in which one finger is placed atop another, so as to trill a slightly higher pitch while the lower finger vibrates.

Other aspects are trickier to discern. A good example of this may be the playing of Sándor Járóka (1922–84), "*Primás* of Kings and King of *Primáses*," who was so respected by his peers that, at his funeral, they spontaneously formed the Budapest Gypsy Symphony. For casual listeners, Járóka may not sound too different from his peers. Why, then, did those peers hold him in awe?

An explanation comes from the remarkable violinist and multi-instrumentalist Tcha Limberger (b. 1977). (Limberger is a Belgian player who excels in the Manouche jazz tradition he grew up with but has also immersed himself in Transylvanian music and *magyar nóta*.) "*Magyar nóta*," he observes, "literally means 'Hungarian song.'" With a repertoire based in vocal music, often, he says, "there's no meter. The only guide you have is not measures or beats—it's the lyrics. You don't have to know what the song is about, but you have to know how the rhythm of the Hungarian language works to be able to time it. Járóka is mostly praised for his expression, and the expression lies exactly in the timing of the phrases."

Limberger also notes that, despite the lack of meter, "when a band is really good, it sounds like one [person] playing." This unanimity results from the clarity of the *primás'* bowing and body language. For example, says Limberger, some *primáses* indicate dynamics by leaning forward and backward. A master like Toki Horváth (1920–71) "could make signs with his pinky on the bow while playing, to egg them on or quiet them down."

It is a tradition that has produced a long line of dazzling stars. After Czinka, *magyar nóta*'s next famed exponent was János Bihari (1764–1827) of whom Franz Liszt wrote, "The sweet tones drawn from his magic violin fell like drops of nectar on our enchanted ears." Bihari is an ancestor of the seven-generation Lakatos dynasty, whose members include the spectacular Sándor Lakatos (1924–94) and current international star Roby Lakatos (b. 1965).

There have been a few examples of a great *primas'* musical story becoming slightly overshadowed by a rather spectacular personal life. As legend has it, the handsome Pali Rácz (1815–85) served as a spy during the 1848 Italian Revolutions, rescued a captured Russian prince, married an Italian heiress, and decided only after his wife's dowry was spent to become his era's greatest *primás*. Of his 36 children, the youngest became a violin wizard himself, and was


WIKIPEDIA
Panna Czinka (1711–72)


JÁNOS DONÁT/WIKIPEDIA
János Bihari (1764–1827)


WIKIPEDIA
Dumitrache Ochialbi (1807–80)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Pali Rácz (1815–85)


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Laci Rácz 36 (1867–1943)


WIKIPEDIA
Cristache Ciolac (1870–1927)


YOUTUBE.COM
Grigoraș Dinicu (1889–1949)


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Imre Magyari (1894–1940)

QUALITON RECORDS
Sándor Lakatos (1924–94)


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Nicolae Neacșu (1924–2002)


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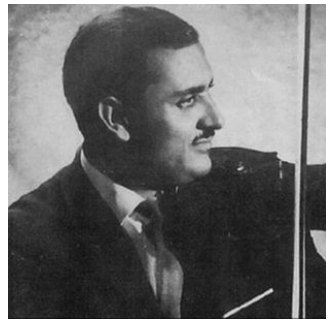
Lajos Boross (1925–2014)


ASPHALT TANGO RECORDS
Ion Petre Stoican (1930–94)

known as "Laci Rácz 36" (1867–1943). Jancsi Rigó (1858–1927) had an affair with an American millionairess, and it is in his honor for which the Rigójancsi torte—chocolate, rum, and apricot—was invented.

It was not, of course, solely in Hungary that the *primas*' art was appreciated. The world's leaders and leading musicians counted among their admirers. Béla Radics (1867–1930) was a favorite of Austria's emperor, Germany's kaiser, and the Prince of Wales; his Budapest funeral drew 150,000 mourners.

Radics' son-in-law, Imre Magyari (1894–1940), had fans in Pablo Casals and Arturo Toscanini, and Yehudi Menuhin called his playing "wonderfully clear, his tone comparable to that of the greatest violinists."

After World War II, under Communist rule, Budapest boasted 75 restaurants with in-house ensembles—Roma bands were a staple of city life. One star of the era was Toki Horváth (the master bandleader who impressed Limberger). Horváth, in the recollection of Pinchas Zukerman, "could do some absolutely amazing techniques with a violin. Seriously! I tried to do some of the things he did, and I simply couldn't." Lajos Boross (1925–2014) impressed Menuhin with his relaxed coordination: a film exists of the two comparing starkly different versions of Brahms' Hungarian Dance No. 17.

Since the end of Communist rule in 1989, *magyar nóta*'s economic viability has waned. Young Hungarian Roma violinists today often gravitate toward jazz or classical music—or increasingly, toward the music of Transylvanian Roma, a rustic, heavily ornamented genre whose great exponent was Sándor Neti (1922–2004). Meanwhile, just as *magyar nóta* began to languish, another Roma genre was making an international splash—southern Romanian *muzica lăutărească*.

Muzica Lăutărească of Romania

Roma identity in Romania had been suppressed during Communist rule, especially under Ceaușescu in the '70s and '80s. *Lăutari* (folk musicians) such as violinist Nicolae Neacșu (1924–2002) were living in poverty. But in 1989, Ceaușescu was overthrown and executed. At once, European musicologists and music promoters descended on Neacșu's village of Clejani. A new *taraf* (band) of violins, whistle, bass, accordions, and cimbaloms was formed: Taraf de Haïdouks. In the ensuing years, their thrilling music would be heard in movies and packed auditoriums worldwide. (A favorite tune, sung by Neacșu, was "Ballad of the Dictator," about Ceaușescu's downfall.)

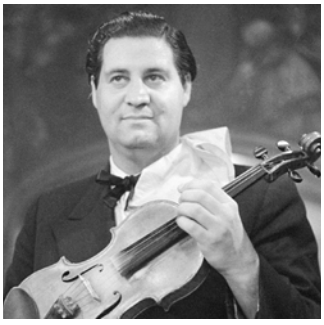
The music of Neacșu and his younger colleague, the joyful Gheorghe "Caliu" Anghel (b. 1960), is a folk art, transmitted orally. According to Neacșu, "You don't learn this job; you steal it. A true *lăutar* is one who,


WIKIPEDIA
Năstase Ochialbi (1835–1906)


NECUNOSCUT/WIKIPEDIA
Sava Pădureanu (1848–1918)


FINDAGRAVE.COM
Jancsi Rigó (1858–1927)


WIKIPEDIA
Béla Radics (1867–1930)


NEPMUVESZETMESTEREI.HU
Toki Horváth (1920–71)


TONY REES/WIKIPEDIA
Schnuckenack Reinhardt (1921–2006)


WIKIPEDIA
Sándor Járóka (1922–84)


HAGYOMANYOKHAZA.HU
Sándor Neti (1922–2004)


DJANGOFESTIVALALLSTARS.COM
Dorado Schmitt (b.1957)


DISCOGS.COM
Gheorghe "Caliu" Anghel (b.1960)


WIKIPEDIA
Roby Lakatos (b.1965)


THORSTEN KRIENKE/WIKIPEDIA
Tcha Limberger (b.1977)

when he hears a tune, goes straight home and replays it from memory. The one who plays it certainly won't teach you." Violinistic features include complex, rhythmic grace-note ornamentation; fast, virtuosic bowing with abundant rosin and cellistic bow holds; and sparing, but some two-fingered, vibrato. Special techniques include ponticello harmonics, termed *ca cavalul* ("shepherd's flute style"); and *la fir de păr* ("hair without bow") in which, instead of bowing, the fiddler ties a horsehair to the G-string, and holds it between rosined finger and thumb to play.

Neacșu's precursors include brothers Dumitrache (1807–80) and Năstase (1835–1906) Ochialbi, who rose from toiling in a boyar field to become prominent violinists. Sava Pădureanu (1848–1918) brought a *taraf* to the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris, and grew so popular on Russian tours that champagne and cigarette brands were named for him. In the early 1900s, Cristache Ciolac (1870–1927) was recognized as Bucharest's best fiddler; his repertoire was a source for George Enescu's compositions.

Jascha Heifetz is said to have called Grigoraș Dinicu (1889–1949) the best violinist he ever heard. Composer of "Hora staccato," Dinicu performed both classical and popular music, while advocating for Roma rights. And, to be filed under the "unusual career boosters" category, under Communism, Ion Petre Stoican (1930–94) scored a record contract by spotting and reporting a suspicious-looking audience member—who turned out to be an American spy.

Sinto and Manouche Traditions

Romanians and Hungarians were also the most popular Roma violinists in Western Europe for much of the twentieth century. The region's Sinto and Manouche musicians tended to emulate their styles until 1967, when Schnuckenack Reinhardt (1921–2006) began, with his band, to re-popularize the swing jazz of Django Reinhardt. Schnuckenack was a German Sinto who, deported to Poland during the Nazi era, disguised himself as an ethnic Hungarian musician. Caught by Polish police, he avoided transfer to the S.S. by charming his captors with his playing. Postwar, he performed Hungarian-influenced music until 1967, when he set out to revive the mid-century Django Reinhardt style: swing played by guitars, violin, and bass.

A cultural awakening followed, with Django-inspired jazz embraced as an emblem of Sinti/Manouche identity. More recent jazz violinists from this community include the German Stadel Weiss, whose extreme, wide vibrato, unanchored at the fingertip, was traditionally Sinto; French guitarist-violinist Dorado Schmitt (b. 1957); the Dutch Wattie Rosenberg; and Limberger, whose grandfather played with Django, and whose family never lost its connection to his style. ■

MR. TOURTE, I NEED A NEW BOW!

How the Tourte design became the model for the modern bow

By Valerie Walden

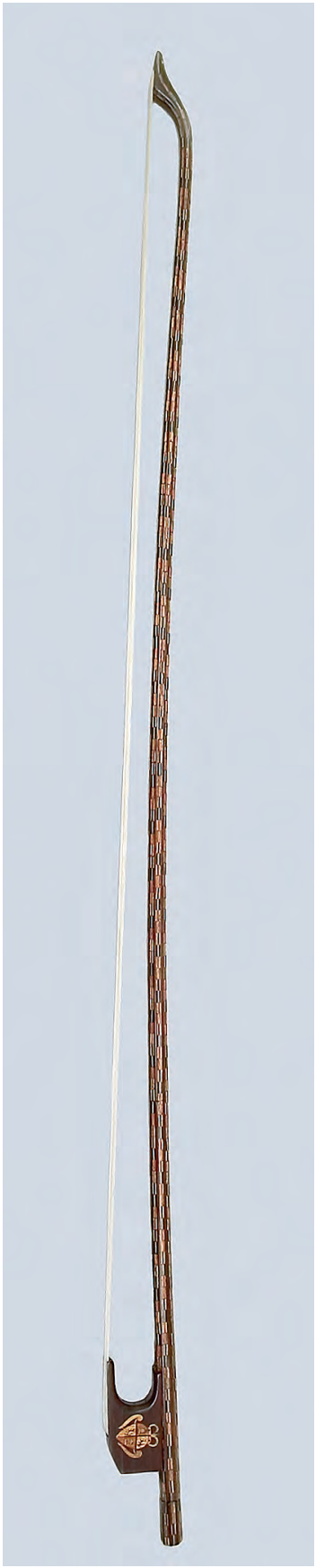


Fig. 1: A beautifully decorated violin bow attributed to the workshop of Antonio Stradivari, c. 1700

Fig. 2: Violin bow, c. 1680 (right); viola/violin bow attributed to François Xavier Tourte, Paris, c. 1800–1810 (left)

In 1816, Dr. J.C. Nicolai commented that all knowledgeable players of the violin family should follow the musical fashion of master violinists Pierre Rode and Louis Spohr, who recognized that of all the available types of bows, "the so-called Paris bow" was the best. Nicolai, a German cellist, contrabass player, and occasional essayist, was promoting the use of the French-design bow to fellow contrabassists, but his article also points to a broader picture of string playing in the early 19th century: if players wanted to be up to date, they needed to use this bow.

Writing a subsequent review of violoncello innovations in 1823, Nicolai reported on another world-class artist and promoter of the "French" bow, cellist and composer Bernhard Romberg. Romberg's adoption of the "modern" bow correlated directly with the technique integrated into his compositions. Nicolai tells his readers these modern musical requirements resulted in corollary changes being made to instrument fittings because "it is almost impossible to play his compositions on instruments that have been fitted in the old manner, that is to say with short, thick necks, and where the fingerboard is low, or lying quite close to the body of the instrument. Many who have seen Romberg play and have had the opportunity to examine his instrument closely have now . . . replaced their fittings with fittings like his. This fitting consisted of the

NATIONAL MUSIC MUSEUM, THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA. PHOTOGRAPHS BY BILL WILLROTH, SR.

insertion of a longer and thinner neck that projects nearly two inches above the body, and the introduction of a groove on the fingerboard that runs down on the side where the C string is."

While Nicolai does not specify any French bow makers by name, Rode, Spohr, and Romberg were not hesitant to credit their favorite archetier, François Xavier Tourte. Spohr and Romberg were especially expansive on the subject. In his violin method, Spohr claimed Tourte bows to be "the best and most sought after" because of their "trifling weight and the elasticity of the stick, the . . . graduated cambre . . . and the neat and accurate workmanship."

As modern players now recognize, Tourte's bows, with a few small additions, have become the gold standard in bow design. But Tourte's model is the culmination of a protracted search for a bow responsive to a variety of musical demands. The story of its development illustrates the interplay of influence among bows, instruments, and musical style.

The first step in this process was the recognition that the bow was a separate, but equal, entity to its instrument. Most Baroque luthiers, including Stradivari, considered the bow an accessory, often created to go with a specific instrument. The instrument was labeled by the maker; the bow was not. Only after the mid-18th century would archetiers begin stamping their creations, as players bought new bows to go with their older instruments.

The bow attributed to Stradivari in **Fig. 1** shows that beautiful, musically compatible bows were made to play Baroque compositions. However, as musical style evolved into the *galant* and *rococo* periods, bowing idioms, and thus bow models, changed. This process became associated with distinctive violinists. Foremost were the innovative Italian players Giuseppe Tartini and Gaetano Pugnani, and Mannheim players Ignaz Fränzl and Wilhelm Cramer. The Italians created lyrical melodic effects and favored full-bodied sound production, accomplishments necessitating long spans of usable bow hair. Drawing inspiration from Italian prototypes, Mannheim players executed intense crescendos, decrescendos, and sudden accents, and had a notable affinity for the lower strings of their instruments. They wanted a bow stick that could apply strong leverage against the string. These musicians all interacted with each other on various tours and made calls to bow makers in London and Paris. By the 1760s, craftsmen had responded to musicians' challenges by creating a variety of bow styles that met the musical requirements.

Now referred to as "transitional" or "Classical" bows, these new bow sticks were elongated and given an inward camber. This required that the tip and frog be reconfigured to place greater distance between the stick and the hair at both ends of the bow. Unlike the more convex "Baroque" bow, whose hair tension eases and shortens when pushed against the string, concave sticks tighten and extend when leveraged downward.

> **"Viotti's violin playing elevated bowing demands in just the way that Tourte's bows made such playing easily achievable."**

A comparison of the two differing camber shapes is shown in **Fig. 2**.

As with bows of earlier style periods, Classical bows were constructed in varying patterns and with varying technological components. Bow sticks were of differing lengths, with differing degrees of camber, camber placement varying from the center of the bow to areas closer to the tip. Wood for these sticks was most often pernambuco, ironwood, or snakewood. Frogs took many different shapes, more expensive bows having frogs of beautiful materials and workmanship. Less expensive bows, including the example pictured in **Fig. 3**, usually had a simple wooden frog whose only purpose was to keep the hair away from the stick. Most, but not all, bows were using the newly devised screw mechanism to tighten hair. Clip-in frogs, where the hair is attached to the underside of the stick and held in place by an inserted, removable frog, were still used on bows of the 1760s and 1770s. Bow tips were as individual as the makers. Many tips had a modified "swan-bill" head, heavier and thicker than the more elongated Baroque version, but still graceful. Increasingly popular was the more upright "hatchet" or "battle-axe" tip (Fig. 3), a design that separated the hair from the stick with great success and, together with the cambering, allowed for leverage to be applied along the entire length of the stick.

The distinctive sounds of Italian and Mannheim string playing became formative to many emerging Classical-era composers. A youthful Wolfgang Mozart proves a good example. Well-traveled and exposed to the newest musical trends in Paris, England, Italy, and eventually Mannheim, he first emulated the Mannheim style in his Fifth Symphony, composed when he was just nine. As an adult, Mozart had such respect for Fränzl's playing, noting his "beautiful staccato, played with a single bowing, up or down," that in 1778 he began writing a violin concerto for Fränzl.

London and Paris were the economic and cultural centers of the two most politically unified European nations of the 18th-century Enlightenment period. Cities where artists could promote themselves in numerous private and public concerts, London and Paris became the centers for 18th-century bow making. In London, the foremost archetier was John Dodd (1752–1839). Pugnani and Cramer both had lengthy tenures in the city, Pugnani living there from 1767 to 1770, while Cramer moved from Mannheim to London in 1772. Cramer's name is closely linked with changes in bow design, "Cramer" bows being lauded by fellow violinists.

Meanwhile, Pugnani visited Paris in 1754 and 1772. Several French bow makers were at that time recognized masters: Duchain, Meauchand, and Tourte being the most

commonly cited. The Tourte family patriarch was Nicolas Pierre (d. 1764). He had two sons who entered the family business, Nicolas Léonard (1746–1807) and, after an eight-year apprenticeship as a clockmaker, François Xavier (c. 1747–1835).

The few known facts about François have been endlessly recounted. And, of course, in the absence of bountiful, verifiable information, legend has poured in to fill the void. According to one such tale, Tourte was an avid fisherman and his bows allegedly began as pernambuco slats taken from packing crates and sugar barrels found at the wharves.

The design characteristics of his remarkable bows are a bit more easily verified. The bows in Figs. 2 and 3 illustrate some of the design variations that Tourte tried along the way to a codified product. Cambering the stick with heat, rather than by carving, he maximized the inherent flexibility of the wood and standardized the stick length and taper. Frequently shaping octagonal sticks, tip forms varied from severe to modified hatchet versions. Frogs became increasingly solid to counterbalance the heavy tips and were inlaid with decorative materials for added weight. The addition of a ferrule proved a successful method of making the increased number of hairs stay flat and even.

Another widely cited anecdote is Tourte's supposed interaction with legendary violinist, G.B. Viotti. Pugnani's star Italian pupil arrived in Paris in 1782, after having toured Europe with his teacher. Viotti mesmerized Parisian audiences, performing his own concertos at the Concert Spirituel public concert series five times in two weeks. His undocumented relationship with Tourte remains reasonable conjecture, however, because Viotti's violin playing elevated bowing demands in just the way that Tourte's bows made such playing easily achievable. What were the characteristics of Viotti's personality and musical language that would have impelled him to seek a remodeled bow?

Fig. 3: Frog and tip of a violin bow attributed to François Xavier Tourte, Paris, c. 1790

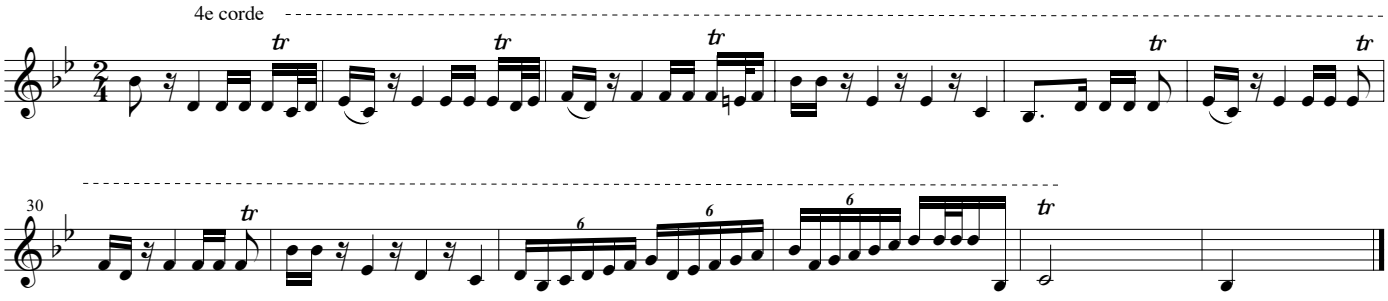
Viotti, like many others of the late Enlightenment (including Viotti concertgoer Thomas Jefferson), was fascinated with scientific and technological experimentation. One can imagine that Viotti might have enjoyed visiting Tourte's workshop for the "tinkering" aspects of talking shop with a professional craftsman of Tourte's caliber. But Viotti also made big musical statements with his bow. His signature sound was full-bodied, and his sonorous exploration of the entire G string occasioned numerous contemporary remarks. This use of the lowest string was a feature even in his earliest compositions. Musical **Ex. 1** is from his Seventh Concerto.

Intensity of sound production, the varied bow strokes found in Viotti's concertos, and the contrasting dynamic nuances all demanded a bow having power, flexibility, and fine balance. These were the playing traits he sought, and these became the distinctive qualities of the Tourte-design bow. Sometimes known as the "Viotti bow," so-named by violinist Michel Woldemar, it quickly became the favored stick of Viotti's violin protégés, Johann Friedrich Eck, Rode, Pierre Baillot, and Rodolphe Kreutzer, and of his cello collaborator, Jean-Louis Duport. Romberg was added to this cadre after his introduction to French virtuosos during a stay in Paris in 1785.

Spohr's conversion involves a greater degree of storytelling.

It began with Eck, a Mannheim violinist, who went to Paris and may have studied with Viotti, though he may have been more of a "follower" than actual pupil. Subsequently, Eck's fame spread. In 1802, Spohr's patron, the Duke of Brunswick, was searching for a teacher. Both Viotti and Eck were approached, but it was Eck's younger brother, Franz, who was induced to teach the younger violinist. Franz insisted that Spohr buy a Tourte bow. Soon after, Spohr also heard a performance by Rode, whose virtuosity and musical style converted Spohr into what he himself called "most faithful imitator of Rode among all the young violinists of that day."

Example 1: G.B. Viotti made extensive use of the G string as demonstrated in this excerpt from his Concerto No. 7 (Rondeau Allegretto, bars 24–35).



The preference for the French bow, and the consequential changes made necessary to the instrument fittings, might have remained parochial with this small group of musicians if not for the political events that overtook Europe in 1789. Favorite performers of Marie Antoinette and other aristocrats, Viotti and Duport fled for their lives, Viotti going to London and Duport joining his older brother, Jean-Pierre, in Berlin.

For other French soloists, and for Romberg and Spohr, the events of the revolution and the political turmoil of the ensuing Napoleonic Wars destroyed the safe, secure environment of the 18th-century patronage system. The French musicians who stayed in Paris found it difficult to make a living from a politically dysfunctional government, while many Italian and German courts were forced to allocate their funds to military expenditures, consequently reducing salaries or cutting their orchestras completely. The only way for performers to make substantial money was to tour. Rode, Baillot, Kreutzer, Romberg, and Spohr packed up their families and their instruments, bows, and Viotti-inspired compositions, and began introducing audiences throughout Spain, Italy, Austria, Germany, Scandinavia, and Russia to the French bow.

> **"As musical style evolved into the *galant* and *rococo* periods, bowing idioms, and thus bow models, changed."**

Charismatic performers all, their audiences and fellow musicians included local string players and composers, Beethoven among them. Beethoven personally collaborated with the Duport brothers and Romberg in 1796 debuts of his Opus 5 cello sonatas, and, with the exception of Viotti, observed performances of the touring violinists. Beethoven's enthusiasm for their virtuosity resulted in the dedication of the Opus 47 sonata to Kreutzer and the completion of the Opus 96 sonata for Rode's 1812 visit.

Fascination with Tourte-design bows, reinforced by the advocacy and technique demonstrated in the published violin and cello methods of Viotti's devotees, did not result in all Classical bows being immediately discarded or rebuilt. But, as attested to by Nicolai's writings, the phase-out process had begun. Meanwhile, Tourte continued to refine his work, remaining in his Parisian workshop until he retired.

A version of this article originally appeared in the October 2005 issue of Strings.

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Learning &

Why I Chose the Violin

From the time I was a small child, one of my earliest and most vivid memories of being introduced to classical music was when I was sitting with my family, watching an amazing orchestra playing on a PBS television special. I distinctly recall wishing to sit there forever, experiencing the majesty of all of those instrumentalists harmonizing and synchronizing, creating musical magic—that truly had a profound impact on me.

Fast forward to a year or so later when I was about three or four years old and walking by Lincoln Center during some pretty bad weather. I saw posters of classical musicians, and there was one of a violinist. It just stirred something deep inside of me. I somehow knew that the violin was my calling and I could just feel the energy of the Juilliard School and Lincoln Center, even though I had no idea what that place was at the time. I just knew I was meant to be there. I had to be dragged away to go home.

Why I Love Being a String Player

Playing the violin is an integral part of my life; I have often described it as kind of like breathing: you don't really think about breathing, you just do it. It's automatic and indispensable simultaneously. Setting aside ample time for practice while juggling academics and extracurriculars is sometimes challenging, but like many who are working hard and dedicating their lives to the pursuit of excellence in any field, it is simply a reflection of love and commitment to the craft. I am inspired by a standard of excellence and a work ethic exemplified by a long line of greats who have made their mark on this instrument. And I also love being able to share my emotions through my playing, connecting with the audience in a way that is heartfelt and meaningful. That truly means a lot to me.

I hope to be able to continue advancing in my skills and, just as importantly, my understanding of the various nuances required, in order that I may become not the best player in the world, but rather the best player that I can be.

Playing my instrument has shaped and transformed my life. From the moment I picked up the violin and drew it close, it became such a treasured part of me and has made a lasting and indelible mark. My journey into the world of playing classical violin was not a casual one. My hunger and desire to learn was and will continue to be voracious. I can't imagine willingly going one day without playing my instrument. Although I do not come from a family of classical musicians, they have been supportive of my love and passion for the violin from the very start of my musical journey. I think that has been a true hallmark of my musicianship.

Name Pilar Winter Hill

Age 15

Instrument Violin

Hometown Brooklyn, NY

School Home school

Bio Violinist Pilar Winter Hill, a classically trained Juilliard Pre-College student with more than 54 million views of her Instagram videos, is a published author, model, and wildlife partner, who, at age 13, became one of the first African American major prizewinners in an international violin competition.

Playing my stringed instrument has not only brought an immeasurable joy and happiness to my life but it has also given me a resolute purpose that I might not have discovered otherwise. Since I started playing, I end each day with either a sense of satisfaction in knowing that I have met goals set for myself, or I've created a plan in my mind to reverse engineer the steps needed in order to do so.

From early on, playing the violin has equipped me with a great sense of responsibility and discipline that benefits practically every aspect of my life. Hard work and sacrifice go hand in hand. The day-to-day is often not glamorous but it's not supposed to be. And that grit results in the appreciation and smiles brought to the faces of those we inspire.

I was so inspired by playing my instrument that I wrote a children's book loosely based on my introduction to the world of music, *A Neighborhood Walk, A Musical Journey*, published by Albert Whitman & Company. It will be available in April 2021. I am enjoying every moment of this beautiful experience and hope to be able to continue my course of learning and discovery for many, many years to come.

My Most Valuable String Lesson

I would have to say that aside from learning, many years ago, how to carefully and meticulously change the strings on my instrument, one of the most significant lessons I remember learning from my teacher of nearly seven years, I-Hao Lee, and from my parents alike, was to not waste time in my practice. To go through the motions of practice without putting your heart into it is just a waste of precious time. Sure, there have been moments

Discovery

I knew right away that the violin was my calling

By Pilar Winter Hill

COURTESY OF PILAR WINTER HILL

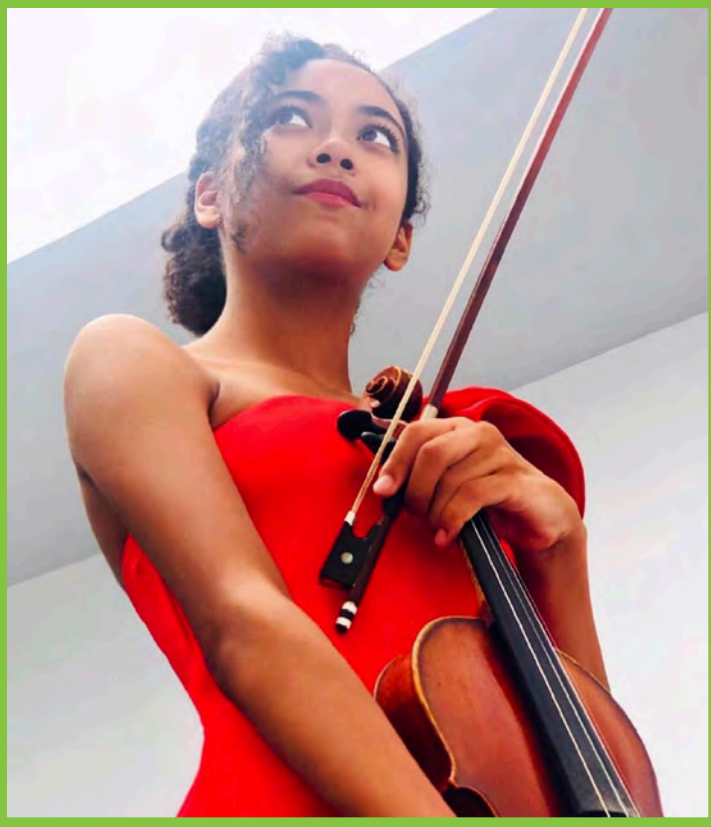
when my mind would drift during practice, but I own that feeling, put my instrument down, and step away to do something else. And as soon as I feel that longing to play, that is when I know it is time to get back to work. I feel that is normal and healthy, at least for me.

My Musical Life

As a student in the Juilliard Pre-College Program (on leave this year due to COVID-19 concerns), I have enjoyed many opportunities to play with other young players in various groups, such as the Juilliard Pre-College Symphony, String Ensemble, and chamber music, which have all been quite exciting.

I feel so fortunate to have been born at a time where the entire world is connected by the internet and social media. This allows so many people, including string players, to not only connect with one another but also to draw inspiration, gain new insights, and see different perspectives that can enhance and inform one's own playing through this global network. I set up my Instagram page and my website, which have both been well received and have garnered a lot of traffic, allowing my performances to be seen and experienced by a far-reaching audience from every corner of the globe. And this in turn also enables me to connect with my supporters almost instantaneously.

I find that a lot of my contemporaries appreciate the level of dedication I have toward playing my instrument. Some may not share my particular passion for playing a stringed instrument or classical music, but they can still relate to having a passion of their own. I feel so happy to know that there are young adults around the world who are interested in my journey, and that my love and passion for my instrument has in some cases fueled them to pursue their own dreams. Some have followed my career for a few years and I am really excited to have such wonderful supporters in young people as well as others from other age demographics, too.



COURTESY OF PILAR WINTER HILL

> "To go through the motions of practice without putting your heart into it is just a waste of precious time."

My Most Memorable Playing Experience

I would have to say that sharing my music with the children and families of a children's hospital in London has been the most humbling and memorable experience for me. I know firsthand what it's like to grow up in a family with someone with a special health concern and how this can affect the whole family. I am so very happy to have been able to share my music at this children's hospital, especially during the holiday season that year. It meant so much to me to be able to see the smiles and happiness radiate from this beautiful community when I played for them. I felt so honored. This has been the biggest career highlight for me to date.

In general, the experience of playing onstage is electric. It's almost indescribable. I go into a space where I allow myself to become one with my instrument, seeking to coax from it all its beauty and magic. I don't overthink the material; I just allow myself to get into a zone.

Living in Brooklyn is awesome but also sometimes quite noisy. When I was younger, I wouldn't want to perform for my family when a loud vehicle passed by outside or construction was going on. My mother quickly impressed upon me that when I play, no matter where or for whom, it's just me, my violin, and my bow. Nothing else matters at that time. To this day, I firmly believe that is what enables me to "let go" in my playing.

My Career Goals

I am certainly considering conservatory training either in the United States or Europe, and I would love to continue writing books and lending my support to global wildlife conservation initiatives. I'd like to pursue a career as a classical recording artist and an actor, traveling the world while sharing my music. ■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Creative

Why I Chose the Violin

I began with the Suzuki Program when I was four. I had a wonderful, caring teacher, Liz Arbus, who inspired me, and I continue to work with her to this day. By age 8, I became exposed to jazz and alternative music styles. My love for music exploded, and I eventually found wonderful versatility playing a five-string violin. The extended range gives me access to the rich tones of a viola without sacrificing the sparkle of the upper registers.

Why I Love Being a String Player

Playing violin has been a crazy and wild ride. It has been such a unique experience to be a violinist in a jazz context. There are a few of us out there, but unlike orchestras or string ensembles that always keep at least a few designated spots reserved for violinists, in the jazz world, I feel like our presence must always be earned. I constantly feel privileged to join with so many other great musicians to collaborate and bring new flavors to the jazz idiom using an instrument that for so long has been one of the sweetest and most expressive gifts to many musical genres. I feel both challenged and honored to have the opportunity to contribute to this great musical legacy. What I love about playing violin is what I love about jazz—a complete freedom to creatively express my own musical ideas and to interact in musical conversations with others.

I am usually the only string player in any group I play with (except for bass and guitar). If anyone has never heard me play before, I am often regarded with quiet curiosity. People aren't sure what to expect. It's kind of a casual "wait and see" vibe. Everyone is always cool about it though, and when people spot my instrument, it's always a great conversation starter.

The feeling I get when I perform is another reason I love jazz so much—it just can't be duplicated. You are creating sounds in the moment that will never be heard again, just like you don't ever have the exact same conversation twice with a group of friends. It's just that special mix, that vibe, and the people that were there to contribute their thoughts at that time.

Play the music that inspires you. For me it's jazz! The violin is an incredibly versatile instrument. There is no limit to how it can be used.

My Most Valuable String Lesson

Undoubtedly, my most valuable string lesson was learning that there was so much more to music than just the notes on the page. We all have an indebtedness to the past masters who lovingly recorded and passionately notated timeless treasures that will forever delight our senses, but one is ultimately transformed and empowered by the recognition that your own musical consciousness can invent and express its own song. Improvisation truly has opened up a new world to me about what music is and the joy of musical conversation.

Name Gianna Pedregon

Age 17

Instrument 5-string violin

Hometown Whittier, California

School Orange County School of the Arts

Bio Honored as an outstanding soloist by the Monterey Next Generation Jazz Festival, violinist Gianna Pedregon is also a National YoungArts finalist and medal winner, outstanding violinist and performer at the Reno Jazz Festival, and a DownBeat honors winner in the high-school category. She has participated in the Colburn Jazz Workshop, Stanford Jazz Workshop, and Berklee Jazz and Gender Justice Workshop.

My Musical Life

I play in various jazz combos and big bands, both inside and outside of school. I play regularly with the Colburn Jazz Workshop, and I was also honored to be selected as a National YoungArts Finalist for 2021, so I look forward to playing with some outstanding musicians in that group as well.

I attend an outstanding conservatory program at my high school, and I am easily able to connect with other string players in the classical conservatory. For my career, however, I am fortunate to be surrounded by outstanding jazz musicians who have generously mentored me, helping me understand the music business and how to best pursue my craft.

My Most Memorable Playing Experience

Without a doubt, I will always remember playing a full set at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 2019. If it weren't for the pandemic, I would have had another opportunity to perform there in 2020. I played with a select group of female high-school musicians known as the Monterey Next Generation Women in Jazz. They are some of the most talented musicians I have had the honor to work with. And playing at the most famous jazz festival in the world was completely unforgettable! Bassist and vocalist Katie Thiroux was our brilliant director, and all the girls in the group were so professional. We pulled off a great performance with just a couple of short rehearsals after everyone converged from around the country just a day before. We played several of our own original tunes, and it was thrilling to think what jazz legends might be listening in the crowd!

My Career Goals

I am a senior in high school right now, and am applying to several music schools around the country. I plan to pursue a major in jazz studies and then build a career as a jazz musician. I would love to get my own group together someday and tour around the world!

Freedom

Jazz and the 5-string violin have unlocked a world of infinite musical possibility

By Gianna Pedregon

DEAN PEDREGON

Stage P

Why I Chose the Cello

In the 4th grade, when I was around 10 years old, we had to pick an instrument and I was more particularly drawn to the stringed instruments. Everybody else was playing violin so I didn't want to choose that, and I really liked the sound of the cello so that's what I chose.

Why I Love Being a String Player

Playing the cello has really opened my eyes to the amazing world of classical music, because before I started playing cello, I didn't know much about the classical world. There are so many talented musicians, and watching them perform inspires me to work harder to reach a higher level. I have had several traveling opportunities because of competitions and music camps. For example, I was able to travel to Detroit for the Sphinx Competition and the Center Stage Strings music camp at the University of Michigan. What I love about this instrument is being able to convey my emotions through music to the audience.

One of the most important things about my string playing is the opportunities I have been given. I've had the privilege of performing in master classes with several gifted artists, attended concerts of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and have had several performance opportunities that will not be taken for granted. I have also enjoyed being able to teach cello and piano to younger students who are developing an interest in music.

My Most Valuable String Lesson

I think the most valuable lesson I have learned from playing the cello is patience. Sometimes practicing is like watching grass grow; you don't see the results you want day to day, but in the long run the results of hard work pay off.

Name Brandon Leonard

Age 15

Instrument Cello

Hometown Stone Mountain, Georgia

School Chamblee Charter High School

Bio Cellist Brandon Leonard received second prize in the 2020 National Sphinx Competition and Center Stage Strings Young Artist Solo Competition. He has also won the Samuel Fordis Concerto Competition and will be soloing with the Georgia Philharmonic. In addition to his participation in such summer music programs as the Tanglewood Junior Strings Intensive, Leonard is a member of the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra and has been featured on NPR's *From the Top*.

My Musical Life

A few outlets I have are the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Talent Development Program and the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra, which offers many performance opportunities, private lessons, and scholarships. I also participate in the annual Georgia Music Educators Association All State Competition once a year, which brings together the top musicians from all over Georgia to play together.

Most of my closer friends are understanding about how the cello is my passion, but others think classical music is boring and not something I should spend my time doing. But I've met several friends who share the passion of playing a stringed instrument at music camps, and I keep in touch with them via text and Zoom.

My Most Memorable Playing Experience

One of my most memorable performance experiences was playing with an orchestra at the 23rd annual Sphinx Competition. I had made it to the finals, and it was my very first time performing as a soloist with an orchestra, so naturally I was extremely nervous when I walked onto the stage. I tried to avoid eye contact with the audience because it would have only made me more nervous. In the beginning, I was still in awe that I was actually playing in the hall where the Detroit Symphony performs. As I continued to play, I felt more comfortable onstage and ended up enjoying myself. It was an unforgettable moment in my life.

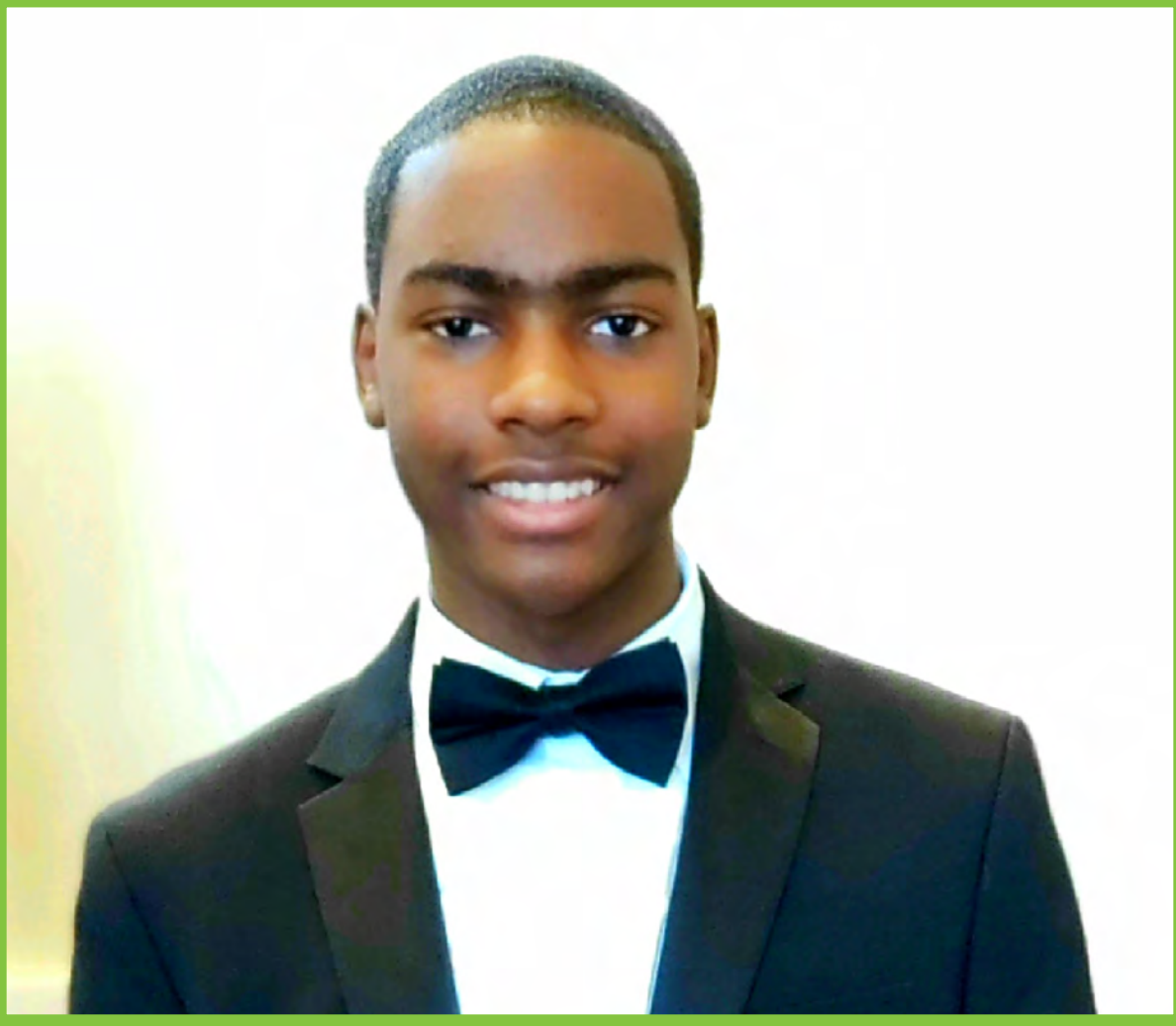
My Career Goals

I love playing the cello and would like to attend college to study music performance. After that, I hope to start a career with a major orchestra or quartet and play music for the rest of my life.

resence

From competitions to orchestral concerts, every performance has been unforgettable

By Brandon Leonard



COURTESY OF BRANDON LEONARD

Multigenre

Why I Chose the Violin

My mom is a cello teacher and she was teaching my older sister cello successfully, so I began cello as well—only to find out I was terrible at it! I struggled for about five months before my parents decided it was time for me to switch. I actually wanted to play the piano, but my parents chose the violin for me instead. I am so glad they did!

Why I Love Being a String Player

Playing the violin has given my life purpose and structure. I absolutely love the violin. It is my entire life's passion. I adore the sound and versatility of the instrument and the beauty of the repertoire. I actually love the detail and the routine of practice—constantly striving to be better in countless little ways, every single day!

My Most Valuable String Lesson

My most valuable lesson is probably the first lesson I ever had with my incredible teacher, Robert Lipsett. He told me something that I had never heard before—that as a fine violinist I should expect perfection from myself and nothing less. Throughout our lives we are told over and over that there is no such thing as perfection, which is true, but neglects to acknowledge that the constant and endless pursuit of it is incredibly fulfilling! To realize that perfection is, in fact, the end goal of artistry was nothing short of revolutionary for my mindset at the time.

My Musical Life

One of my most important outlets as a young string player is multigenre music, specifically folk music. My sister and I have been playing folk music for about eight years now and have had the chance to learn from some incredible masters, such as Mark and Maggie O'Connor and Alasdair Fraser and Natalie Haas. We have been lucky enough to attend the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend, Washington (staying with our aunt and uncle, a banjo player and a fiddler respectively, who got us hooked on fiddling in the first place!). Having a chance to make music in a laid-back community environment, learning music by ear, and working with the driving rhythmic patterns of folk music have all been incredibly freeing for my musicianship. Alasdair Fraser talks about tapping into the groove and alleviating "boring bow"—valuable lessons for classical musicians! Our multigenre work has led us to do things like make videos of our arrangements of pop tunes (the Beatles, Michael Jackson, Elvis) and so much more! Multigenre music is my favorite way to have fun on the violin.

Name Charlotte Marckx

Age 18

Instrument Violin

Hometown Bellevue, Washington

School Colburn Conservatory of Music, Los Angeles

Bio Violinist Charlotte Marckx was named a 2019 Davidson Fellow, and won the gold medal and Bach prize at the 2018 Stulberg International String Competition. She was also a major prizewinner at the 2018 Johansen International Competition for Young String Players. Marckx has soloed with many orchestras and has been featured on such programs as NPR's *From the Top*. As a multigenre artist, she performs with her sister Olivia in their duo, Sempre Sisters, and studies with Robert Lipsett.

Social media has been a great way to be in contact with people who want to follow my career—I am Facebook friends with people who saw one of my concerts years ago! Working with my sister in our duo is also a really big part of how people follow me and how I connect with people in the music world.

My friends have always been very supportive of my violin career. From a young age I would bring my violin into class whenever I could find an excuse, so most of the kids I know have heard me play at some point. Being a violinist is kind of my "thing" among my friends—it is an important part of my identity socially, and my friends always get invested in whatever I'm working on.

My Most Memorable Playing Experience

In 2018 I competed in the Johansen International Competition and my judge was the incomparable Chee-Yun Kim. I had been a fan of hers for so long, and getting to meet her and play for her was an absolute dream. About a year and a half later my sister and I were, by some stroke of luck, invited to be artists at the Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival, and when I found out I would be playing second violin to Chee-Yun for a week of chamber music, I could not believe it! The whole experience felt unreal. Performing and collaborating with her were huge life highlights!

My Career Goals

My goal as a musician is to devote myself to the art of perfecting my skills on the violin. I can't say for sure how that will translate into a career path! I know that I want to have a career in music and I love practicing and performing in concerts. Of course, a dream career would be working as a soloist, but any career that would encourage me to spend quality time with the instrument and the great works of art that make up the violin repertoire would be ideal for me.

Adventure

Playing both classical and fiddle music has led to incredible musical experiences

By Charlotte Marckx

COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE MARCKX

MY PERSONAL VOICE

Joshua Gindele's contemporary cello is an old soul

By Laurence Vittes

Joshua Gindele

JEFF WILSON

Cellist Joshua Gindele began his cello studies at the age of three, playing a viola his teacher had fitted with an endpin. Turn the page a few years and he is now celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Miró Quartet, of which he is a founding member. The ensemble, which serves as faculty quartet-in-residence at the University of Texas at Austin, was also in the course of celebrating the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, having recently completed their recorded cycle for Pentatone, when the pandemic struck.

The quartet did come together in-person for a dozen concerts during July and August, performing the Beethoven cycle with the *Grosse Fuge* live for online audiences. Presented by the Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival via streaming platform OurConcerts.live, the video feed, featuring audiophile sound, was professionally produced at a private performance space in Austin.

While the future remains in the planning stage, and the Miró's next big project "remains to be settled," the quartet continues to record pre-taped events and perform some livestreams. They also have a number of important commissions from composers in the offing. I talked to Gindele in mid-December about his cello.

Please tell me about your instrument.

I play on a cello by the modern American maker, Lawrence Wilke. He lives in Clinton, Connecticut, and I've had the cello now for six years. It's basically a copy of Janos Starker's Goffriller cello, and has been antiqued to look like an old instrument, with a sort of golden brown, red finish. Goffriller used to make a lot of cellos with poplar and Larry wanted to do something similar but he wasn't happy with his stock of poplar, so he bought a stock of a wood called quaking aspen, resembling poplar—soft and light—and used it for the back and sides. Because of the wood's density, it's actually thicker on this cello than it would be even if he had used poplar like Goffriller did.

How did you acquire your cello?

I got the cello from one of my best friends, Nicholas Tzavaras, who happens to be the cellist of the Shanghai String Quartet. We were playing together and I loved the way it sounded. I told him that if he ever wanted to sell it, I would buy it from him. And he immediately said, "Sure. Why don't we just have Larry make another cello? You can have this one and I can play the new one." Larry was up for it and Nick now owns basically this instrument's twin, its sister. Everything I loved about it when I heard Nick play it, I still love about it.

And what do you love about it?

I always strive to find a cello that sounds like my personal voice, and this cello was the closest thing I had found to it with one exception; that was the 1713 "Bass of Spain"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Stradivari, on which I recorded a couple of albums a few years ago. But I obviously can't afford a Stradivari. My cello is a little more difficult to play than others that I've had but it's got a richness to it that reminds me of an old Italian cello.

What did you play before this?

I had a wonderful cello built for me by Phillip Injeian in Pittsburgh; it was a copy of the 1739 "Hancock" Montagnana. I played it for quite a long time. It was a very big cello physically, but it was exceedingly easy to play, very responsive—a very big-sounding, projecting cello. One of my students is currently playing that cello. Prior to that I had an old Parisian cello that was quite small and petite; it was great for playing recitals, concertos, and piano trios, but it didn't have the supportive bass I wanted for our quartet.

What do you need for your quartet?

We focus everything from the bottom up, so having a really strong, supportive bass in an instrument and in the player is really important. We also play with a lot of articulation in our sound, so I have to be able to keep up with our violinists in terms of both speed and articulation even at the bottom end. Think the beginning the last movement of Mendelssohn's Octet.

> "Play cellos that are in and out of your price range that are really special to get an idea of what's possible."

How many cellos did you use over the course of your recorded Beethoven cycle, which began in 2004 and concluded in 2019?

The early quartets were recorded on the French cello, and the Opus 59 quartets were recorded on a Carlos Tononi cello that once belonged to Pablo Casals. I played the "Bass of Spain" Stradivari for Opus 74 and Opus 95. I played a mixture of the Injeian cello and my new Wilkie cello for the late quartets. I would say that each of the other players changed instruments at least three different times.

What about bows?

I have a bow problem. I love them. They all have their own sounds. They're balanced differently in the hand. The density of the wood is different. They all do something different on the instrument. I have four or five favorite bows that I rotate between, depending on how I'm feeling or what I want from the sound of the cello or what feels comfortable in my hand at the time. Most of my bows are modern.

I have two modern French bows in my case right now, one by Christophe Collinet, which I bought in 1996 and is my oldest. The other one is by Eric Grandchamp, who makes spectacularly beautiful bows. His style has become sort of ubiquitous among French bow makers in the last 30 years or so. I like the subtlety of nuance I can get out of bows like these that are a little lighter and more flexible. I don't like really heavy bows, which surprises most people because I am a pretty big guy.

Do you have any advice for a player ready to choose a cello?

Play as many as you can; dozens if you can do it. Play cellos that are in and out of your price range that are really special, including old Italian or old French instruments, to get an idea of what's possible, what you like, and what you don't like. There's not necessarily any correlation between expense and quality. There are lots of fine instruments you can get at reasonable prices. After settling on a few—as many as four if you can transport them—play them in a concert hall and in your own space. Practice with them. Give yourself a good week or more so you can really feel what it's like to play the instrument on a regular basis. The more instruments that you can play, the better off you are. Rushing to buy a cello is never a good idea.

What do you play to try them out?

I pick something singing up on the A string, something low on the C string, both loud and soft, to see how well it speaks. Quick passages, like Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 59, No. 3, show how quickly the instrument speaks. Then try out a good bit of the cello concerto literature—and the string-quartet literature, too. ■

JOSHUA GINDELE'S OTHER GEAR

Strings

I use Rondo by Thomastik-Infeld and would be remiss not letting people know that the whole quartet is sponsored by Thomastik-Infeld. I'm not averse to other brands of strings but on my particular cello these are the best that I've been able to find, even experimenting beyond Thomastik's lineup. The most famous low strings on the cello for the last 30 years were Thomastik Spirocore, and I played and loved them for years, but [I've found] these new Rondo strings have more depth and warmth. One other thing, these strings don't have a break-in period. I can put them on my cello and play them immediately.

Case

I've had the same Accord case since maybe 2004: their most robust version because I'm on an airplane so much. I wanted something light, but I definitely needed something that could withstand all the travel. And it's been rock solid. Twice a year, I clean and lube all the hinges and let the case air out.

Rosin

There is a cellist who lives in the New York metropolitan area who has a new company called Bella Rosin. He sent me his first prototype rosin, a fabulous, bespoke, handmade rosin that he's doing fun things with. It's smooth, it's got a good kind of stickiness that works all year, and it doesn't have a lot of rosin dust, so there's not white dust all over my cello when I'm done playing concerts.

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A NEW YORK STORY

Eric Aceto is on a quest to reinvent stringed instruments

By Greg Cahill

Eric Aceto of Ithaca Stringed Instruments (ISI) grew up in a family of musicians and artisans, but it took a while for the violin to enter his life. At seven, he started playing the guitar and would accompany his grandfather on Italian folk tunes and Neopolitan songs. He later joined two brothers to form Quarteto Aceto, playing those same Italian songs. At 16, an uncle gave him a violin—he became fascinated with the instrument. Soon, while attending Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and Nazareth College, Aceto developed an affinity for wood and began building instruments. "Much of my woodworking education was from while I was working building wooden boats on the Chesapeake Bay in my 20s," he says. "I also owned a musical-instrument

Eric Aceto

DIANE RICHARDS

store, from 1978 to 1993, where I did most of the repair and restorations of stringed instruments."

These days, Aceto is an in-demand luthier, accomplished session player, and performer—he studied under concert violinist Rolfe Sokol, but plays everything from acoustic folk and blues to jazz and electric rock. He has a workshop in Trumansburg, New York, near Ithaca, and is known for experimentation and for building a wide range of instruments, from guitars and mandolins to violins, violas, and cellos. His acoustic bowed stringed instruments include the Baroque-era violoncello da spalla—a small cello braced against the shoulder. "I have been studying instrument design and the violoncello da spalla with maestro Dmitry Badiarov. I am currently working on my third of these," he says of the da spallas. "I absolutely love this instrument—it's right up my alley."

Concert violist, composer, and recording artist Lev "Ljova" Zhurbin owns two of Aceto's more esoteric instruments: a fadolín and a famiola. "Both are six-string instruments, just different sizes," Ljova explains. "A fadolín is a violin-sized instrument with a 'fa' and a 'do'—hence FA-DO-(vio)-LÍN—and a famiola is a viola-sized instrument with a 'fa' and 'mi'—hence FA-MI-(vi)-OLA."

And the sound?

"Entirely original—closer to a Baroque viol than a traditional violin or viola," says Zhurbin, "but with a tone gritty enough to be a bass or a guitarrón. Full of the soul of their maker, yet flexible enough to sound like the whim of their player. Eric is a boundless inventor and explorer—he never stops learning, tweaking. He is always discovering and making new things, refining every part of his craft and our instruments. He is like a father to all of us fadolín kids, a true mensch, and his shop is a home we can always come back to, always a place of inspiration."

But Aceto is perhaps best known for his four-, five-, six-, and seven-string acoustic-electric violins, which have attracted such top-tier artists as Jean-Luc Ponty, Darol Anger, and Zach Brock. "I got my first five-string violin in 1978 and played five-strings until I took an order for a six-string in 2002," Aceto explains. "Building that instrument was a revelation and now is my personal choice in a violin. Since that time, I have been working to produce an instrument with a huge sonic range, satisfying to play. I love not only the sheer beauty of the lower strings, but also being able to get 'underneath' and be more in a supportive role in the music rather than always 'on top' of the music. I don't consider it an odd instrument and take inspiration from the many Baroque instruments with extended ranges."

His NV violins, developed in collaboration with fellow luthier Daniel Hoffman, differ from traditional acoustic-electric violins in that the NV has no f-hole, bass bar, or sound post—elements of volume and projection typically deemed essential to the acoustic bowed instrument. Rather, this innovative design focuses on tone production through the use of plate graduation, voiced tone bars, and air-chamber tuning, so the sound is transmitted throughout the entire instrument directly into the pickup. "My current studies are building extended-range violins using a system of proportion based on the string length of the instrument," Aceto says. "The goal is to create an instrument that has full and even response across the range, that speaks easily without great effort, and is responsive to the player with a sound they find inspirational."

> "Eric is a boundless inventor and explorer, always discovering and making new things."
>
> *—Lev "Ljova" Zhurbin*

On Aceto's website, jazz violinist Brock notes: "When I got my first NV, a process began that allowed me to reach sounds I had been trying to express for years."

In 1998, fiddler Darol Anger was no less effusive when he wrote in *Strings*, "[The NV] is capable of tonal colors and a dynamic range much closer to an acoustic violin than any other electric I've ever tried. I believe it constitutes a quantum leap forward in electric-violin tone."

For Aceto, the development of the NV violin was an evolutionary process. "I was building 'chambered' instruments and having some success—many of these are still in use by various artists," he says. "I also was working on pickup design. When I eventually came to a pickup design that I felt was representative of the instrument it was on, I decided that the next step was to make the instrument itself sound better. I was looking for a responsive and full-bodied tone that delivered the visceral feel of a quality violin. I like a powerful but sweet top end and a gritty low end."

While developing his acoustic-electric models, Aceto began researching the various types of pickups and mics. "I obtained every type of piezo material I could and began experimenting," he says. "I placed pickups all over the instrument and eventually decided on a bridge-based system. I auditioned the different types and sizes of material by building a pickup and playing it on a live gig. After I felt I had taken the bridge pickup as far as I could, I began using that same technique of auditioning all the electret mic elements available to find what I felt worked best in a live situation. I dislike a tangle of wires and having to assemble an instrument before playing, so a single cable solution was paramount."

The result is his plug-and-play ISI dual mic/pickup system that combines a piezo bridge pickup and a tiny goose-neck mic. "My aim was a simple, reliable, and great-sounding amplification system that could deliver the character of the violin without the usual annoyance of a blended system," he says.

Does that mean Aceto has created a perfect sound? "I don't feel there is one perfect sound," he says. "Do you prefer the sparkle and sweetness of a Strad or the drive and power of a Guarneri? I feel that any builder's instruments have a certain style, an individual character. I like a sweet top end that is powerful, but does not aggressively hurt the ears. I like a lot of clarity and grit in the low end. I don't like a tubby sounding low end." ■

BACK TO BACK

In what ways do instruments with one- and two-piece backs actually differ?

By Brian Wise

"A one-piece cello back of beautiful, quartered maple is, well, dead sexy," says Marilyn Wallin, a noted violin maker based in Lincoln, Nebraska. "It draws you in for its rarity, and doesn't disappoint. It's just so much of a good thing."

Other luthiers agree, pointing to the scarcity of available wood large enough for even a one-piece violin or viola back, let alone that of a cello. While there are various other ingredients that can determine the brilliance of an instrument—including the stiffness or density of its wood—the choice between a one- or two-piece back still sparks plenty of debate, with questions over tonal quality, aesthetics, stability, and value.

A George Yu one-piece back (left) and a Paul Crowley two-piece back

ONE-PIECE BACK IMAGE © GEORGE YU; TWO-PIECE BACK IMAGE COURTESY OF PAUL CROWLEY

Methods of Construction

The back of a violin, viola, or cello is usually fashioned from one or two matched pieces of maple, built according to one of three methods. A two-piece back may be fashioned by cutting a log "on the quarter," creating a pie-shaped wedge. The wedge is then sliced down the middle and opened up like a book ("book-matched"), as the wider edges are glued together to make a wide plank.

Alternatively, one-piece backs may also be quarter-sawn, and will behave much like two-piece, quarter-sawn backs, only there is no need for a center joint. A third type of back is "slab-cut," meaning that the wood is cut through the log, while avoiding the pith, or center, and capturing more of the annual rings.

Tonal Impact

David Burgess, a luthier from Ann Arbor, Michigan, says that, all things being equal, one- and two-piece backs produce the same tonal result. "Sonically, I would say there is no difference, as long as the grain orientation is the same," he says. "The advantage of a two-piece back is one doesn't need as large of a tree. One has more to choose from if you don't need a huge tree."

Andy Fein, a Minnesota maker, agrees that the differences are negligible. "In my many years of listening to stringed instruments, I have not heard any discernible, general tonal differences between one- and two-piece-back instruments," he writes in an e-mail. "That's assuming the instrument was made with good, dry wood, graduated and arched well, and has a good setup."

Some makers say that slab-cut one-piece backs, which can be a little heavier, produce a deeper, rounder sound. But when it comes to quarter-sawn one- and two-piece backs, "they are going to sound the same," says Paul Crowley, a maker based in Maplewood, New Jersey. "I can't imagine that the joint has much of an impact acoustically."

Aesthetics

"The choice is a matter of aesthetics, all other things being equal," says Louisville, Kentucky, violin maker George Yu. "I like the single-piece a lot, but you pay a premium for the wood." One-piece back enthusiasts have bonded over the Instagram hashtag #onepieceback, and often obsess over Cremonese models. "I defer to Stradivari as my authority on the legitimacy of one-piece backs," says Fein. "He used them in at least one-third of his instruments."

Because one-piece backs are sourced from a larger tree, a maker may have some leftover wood for other components. "You can always cut the ribs from the same board that the back is going to be made of," says Wallin. "It's all the same wood and you don't have to mess around with color matching with varnish. There's a harmony because of the width of the flame, and because of the grain."

But two-piece backs also have their admirers. Philadelphia maker Christopher Germain writes in an e-mail that "if you have highly angled grain, you can book-match [the two pieces] and get a V shape" radiating from the center joint. "If you flip one side, then the flames will continue all the way across. The flames won't match up, but they can be basically one line, from one side to the other."

Stability and Longterm Maintenance

On the question of structural stability, Wallin gives a slight edge to two-piece backs. "Slab-sawn one-piece backs don't settle down as fast as two-piece backs," she says. "That is because a one-piece back actually stretches in length as the player is pushing down on the bridge through the top." The length of a violin may expand by up to a millimeter during the first 12 to 18 months of its lifetime.

Burgess agrees that slab-sawn one-piece backs have a greater tendency to distort in shape, particularly amid fluctuating humidity. But in some cases, the center joint on a two-piece back may come unglued over time. "A lot of old instruments have had the center joint redone at one time or another," Burgess adds. "It should last the original owners' lifetime with no problem, unless they expose it to harsh conditions like super-high humidity, which may expand and contract the wood in such a way that it puts more pressure on the joint."

> **"In my many years of listening to stringed instruments, I have not heard any discernible, general tonal differences between one- and two-piece back instruments."**
>
> ***—Andy Fein***

Fein is more skeptical about stability differences. "In the 43 years I've been in the field of violin making, I have not seen any difference in the stability of one-piece vs. two-piece backs," he writes.

And Tops?

Tops are almost always cut on the quarter, and there are few advantages to pursuing a one-piece top. "I can't say that I've noticed a difference," says Crowley. "From a making perspective, having two pieces is nice because I always know where the center line is. I don't think that there is any sonic difference."

Bottom Line

If aesthetes value the beauty of one-piece backs and stability advocates prefer two-piece backs, the jury is out on market value. Julie Reed-Yeboah, owner of Reed Yeboah Fine Violins, estimates that two-piece quarter-sawn violins account for about two-thirds of fine instruments for sale. But with rare exceptions, she says, "I don't think makers themselves would differentiate [on price] unless it's a special order, such as a copy of an older instrument."

Ultimately, says Wallin, there are other, crucial factors to consider when it comes to selecting backs. "The weight of the wood, the depth of the curl, and the flexibility of the wood are all much more important than whether it's in one or two pieces." ■

KUN 'STYLE ICON' SHOULDER RESTS

New series kicks off with a set inspired by Shanghai

By Megan Westberg

Gone are the days when the only options for stringed-instrument accessories were clad in dull monotones. Cases come in leopard print, fittings gleam and sparkle, and your shoulder rest can make a strong style statement as it provides just the right support. Kun, inspired by the annual host city of the Music China trade show, has launched its new Style Icon series with the limited-edition Shanghai set, offering three new designs by Paul Berthelot to choose from: "charming flowers," a pattern of delicate flowers over a red background; "delicate feathers," an ode to peacock plumage; and "sculpted waves," an undulating pattern of various blues and silver. The designs are wrapped around the company's Bravo shoulder rest, and are meant to "celebrate the global nature of music-making."

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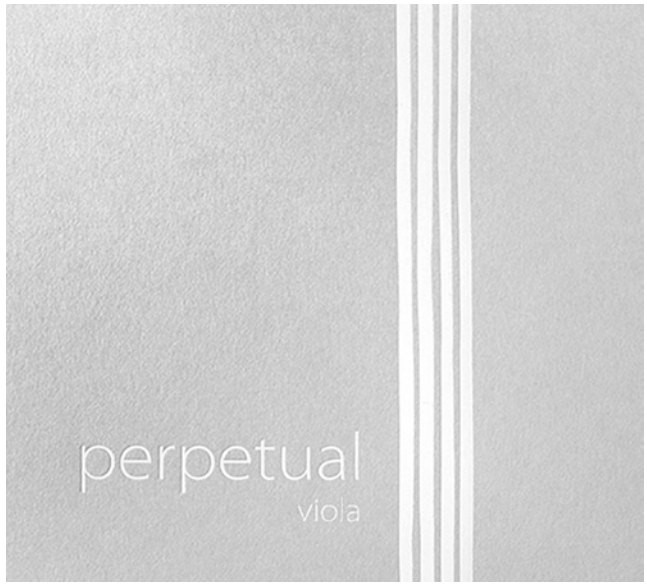

COURTESY OF KUN, PIRASTRO

PIRASTRO PERPETUAL VIOLA STRINGS

This set, designed for volume and projection, completes the Perpetual line

By Megan Westberg

Pirastro initially released its Perpetual line as a set for cello in 2016. The company has now completed the line by bringing its viola set to market, after violin and bass sets made their appearances in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Pirastro describes Perpetual as a string for players looking for volume and carrying power, emphasizing "precisely focused sound projection, vibrant response," and tuning stability. The set comes with a steel/chrome steel A string (also available separately with a loop end instead of the standard ball end); synthetic core/silver D and G strings; and a rope core/tungsten C. Perpetual viola strings are available in medium gauge, 4/4 size only.

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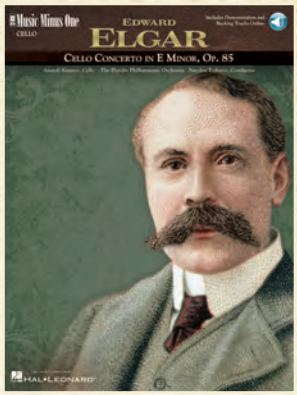

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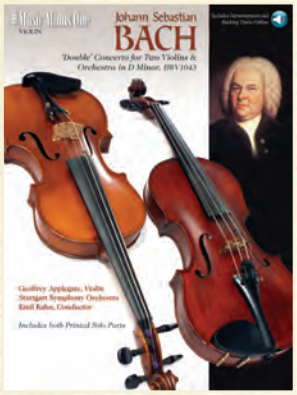

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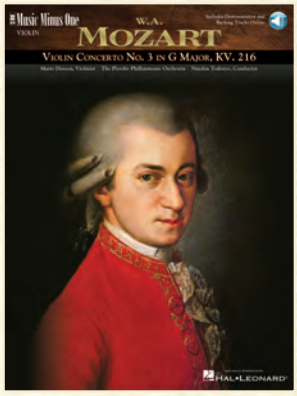

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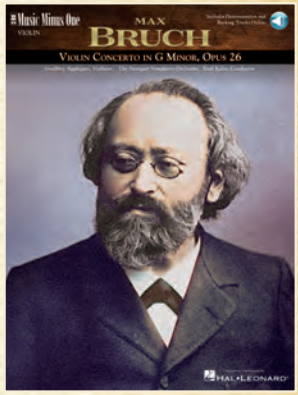

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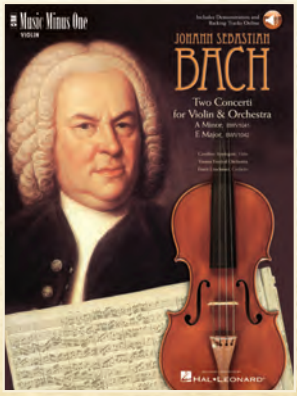

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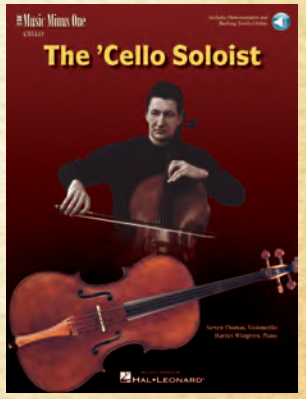

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LEAN ON ME

Finding beauty and expression in appoggiaturas

By Scott Flavin

"Consonance is boring; dissonance is interesting."
—Anner Bylsma

Appoggiatura is from the Italian, meaning "to lean upon, rest." Musically, it is defined as a note, one step above or below the "main" note, performed before a note of the melody and falling on the beat; it usually creates a dissonance with the prevailing harmony and resolves on the following weak beat. Appoggiaturas became an important voice-leading device in all music after the 16th century, and are found throughout all periods of music, from Bach to the Beatles and beyond. For example, in the Adagio from Bach's Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001, for solo violin, you find appoggiaturas throughout (see **Example 1**, p 65). As you can see, this movement of Bach is saturated with appoggiaturas, helping to create a feeling of deep sadness and yearning. For a more contemporary reference, the Beatles' song "Yesterday" starts with a downward appoggiatura on the first word of the song. Just imagine (forgive the pun) "Yesterday" without that appoggiatura—the first bar of the music would be totally devoid of introspection and reflection.

Appoggiaturas are so powerful in terms of emotional content because they create an influence on harmony as well as melody; from the operatic vocal tradition of sospiro ("sigh"), the descending resolved dissonance shows pain, longing, and beauty—truly a musical cry of despair. However, all too often, players ignore the expressive possibilities in appoggiaturas.

First, the Search

So first of all, how do you find them if you're not sure where they are? One strategy is to look at the full score and relate your part to it. If you find non-chord tones, that is, notes that do not belong to the notes of the harmony, they may be appoggiaturas. Look for the following note to be either a step below or above the possible appoggiatura. Another strategy is to sing the phrase to yourself—you more than likely will hear the dissonance and expression in the appoggiaturas; in any case, your singing voice won't steer you wrong, even if you're not a trained singer.

The Beatles' song "Yesterday" starts with a downward appoggiatura on the first word of the song.

Explore Appropriate Emphasis

Now that you've found the appoggiaturas, how do you play them? First, remember that because appoggiaturas are dissonances, you want to emphasize them. Think of the myriad ways you can do that, both with the bow and the left hand. For example, you can take a cue from the original Italian word, and lean into them with the bow, slowing down bow speed and adding weight to give emphasis. In terms of the left hand, vibrato accentuation will be very important. As always, the context of the music will help you find the meaning in each note.

You can also give greater importance to appoggiaturas by playing them slightly longer in duration. Called an agogic accent, this allows you to give appoggiaturas a natural inflection. As with rubato, whenever you take time in music, you must make up that time, to preserve the pulse of the music.

Another very important tool in the string world is manipulating pitch for appoggiaturas. When you use "expressive intonation," you follow the pull of certain notes within the harmony. For example, if you have an appoggiatura descending by a half step, play the upper note as close in pitch to the lower note as possible, highlighting the emotion. Conversely, if the appoggiatura is ascending, play it sharp, as close to the following note as possible for maximum effect.

Consider the Meaning

You must always connect every note with the meaning of the music. In **Example 2**, from the first movement of the Brahms Violin Concerto, there are multiple appoggiaturas, one after the other. If you were to play all of

them with maximum expression, the music would most certainly get bogged down and become a morass of over-emotive notes. So you must find a hierarchy to these successive appoggiaturas.

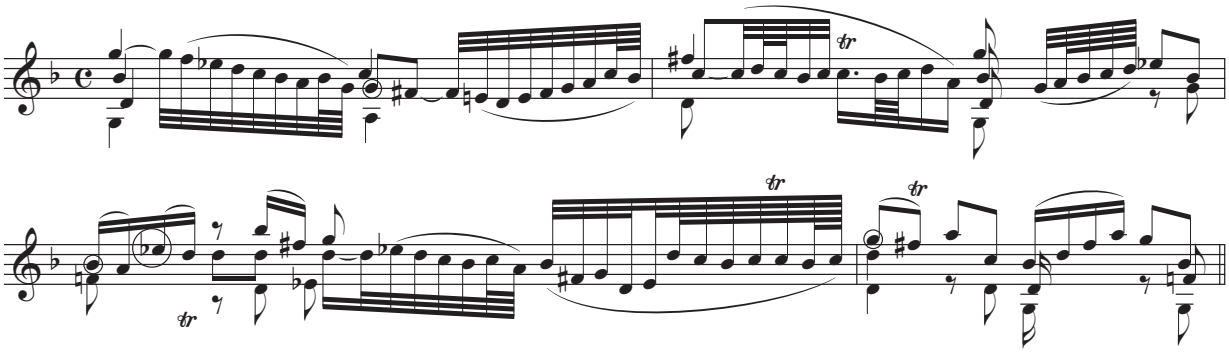
In this case, three sets of two bars of appoggiaturas build to the culminating appoggiatura before the trill in the third bar, creating a sense of shape and phrasing that is entirely musical. Conversely, were you not to acknowledge any of these appoggiaturas (as quite a few violinists do), this passage would become rather less meaningful, and certainly would lose a great deal of color as a result.

As a performer, you are always searching for ways to share the brilliance of music with an audience; when you become more aware of the rich expressive possibilities of appoggiaturas, you can use them to show ever-greater depth and emotion in your playing.

Example 1

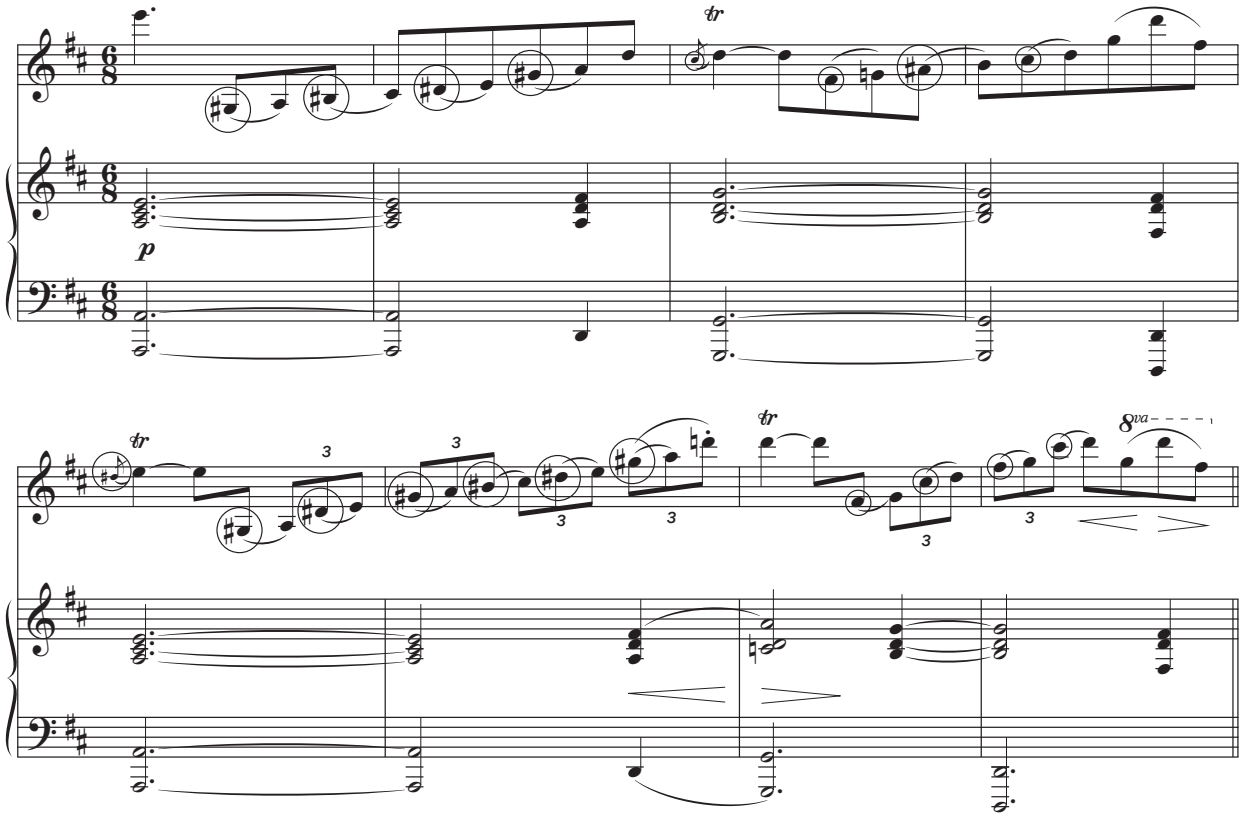
J.S. Bach Violin Sonata No. 1 in G minor, BWV 1001

Adagio



Example 2

Brahms Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77, Allegro non troppo, mm. 142–149



FOR THE BETTER

Lockdown has helped me re-evaluate my own development as a cellist and teacher

By Emily Wright

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMILY WRIGHT

If necessity is the mother of invention, 2020 was the *grande dame* of it. As my life shrank down to the size of a couple of rooms and a few screens, certain things took on outsized importance. For instance, I now have an improbable number of plants throughout the house. I've become one of those people who propagates cuttings in test tubes. Sometimes I just smile at them, watching the fine, hairlike roots wispily floating in the water. "Not yet!" I tell them, sensing their desire to be planted.

Watching them grow is comforting when so little comfort is on offer. I miss teaching students in my home studio with an intensity that surprises me; I long for the shared pot of tea on a cold day, incense burning on the front porch to guide them to the door, ending the lesson with a favorite duet and a long exhale. Teaching online can feel impersonal in comparison, but *la grande dame* has offered me the space to re-evaluate the way I approach my own musical and teaching life. As a result, I've made a few changes that I will carry forward after COVID.

Back to School

As cautions became advisories and eventually turned into full-on lockdown, all of my gigs and many of my students evaporated. Weeks wore on, and there were some bleak moments of feeling disconnected from my identity as a musician. I started thinking back to when I felt the most plugged in and hopeful about being a cellist (as an undergrad) and realized that much of the frisson of that time was a byproduct of taking in so much new information and challenging myself. So, I made a list of books to read or re-examine, bought four new sonatas to learn and critically study, and asked colleagues for recommendations of new music to listen to. From these sources, I created a yearlong curriculum of practice, reflection, and scholarly study. To make sure I reached out to other musicians for insight, had deadlines to meet, and a sense of accountability, I started a podcast to be the work product of my "course."

Charging the Same Rates

I used to charge lower rates for online lessons, figuring the difference in experience was substantial enough to merit some sort of recognition. About six months into online-only tuition, I noticed students were improving just as much, if not more, compared to in-person sessions. Rapport continued to build. Folks I had started as beginners were thriving. Calls went long, just as lessons in my home studio go long.

I've reminded many new teachers that payment is for *their time*. Time booked during a specific day, yes—but also the time spent practicing, sitting in master classes, in rehearsals, at home, hunched over a score, puzzling out what Messiaen or Haydn or Ives

had been up to. That is the time teachers are paid for, and the occasional internet signal degradation does not alter it. I am a champion of teachers charging what they're worth, but in this way held myself out as an exception to this principle. It feels like a step in the right direction to resolve that dissonance. A cadence in the key of self-worth.

Taking a Break

Self-employment cuts both ways: there is near complete freedom to set a schedule, but without the infrastructure or incentive to take time off. It's hard to pause the hustle, especially when things are tight. If there is money to be made, make it, right?

Until just recently, I had not taken a week off for pleasure in over ten years. Every other block of time off was spent doing something: recovering from surgery, doing some other work, traveling for a wedding or funeral, scouting locations for other future work.

> "I've reminded many new teachers that payment is for *their time.*"

Even my days off would occasionally have a lesson or two punctuating the white square in the planner. And though the COVID-induced drop in student load and performance work certainly left me with more time on my hands, it was not time spent feeling a sense of relaxation. The hustle is a lifestyle. It doesn't turn off just because the meter isn't running. I felt a sense of tremendous guilt during those hours of downtime, no matter what I did during them.

One morning my phone, which is obviously spying on me, fed me a news article about American work culture and how little vacation time we use, and the toll on physical and mental health it can take. With shaking hands, I typed an email to my students: "I will be taking one week off."

For a self-employed teacher, there is usually a whisper from the Greek chorus after that sentence: "*Without pay.*"

A day into my staycation, I sent an email to those same students and asked if they would be willing to subsidize two weeks a year of paid time off for me. Two lessons paid for but not taken. This is not as wild a proposition as it seemed to me: I know many teachers who work this way, some with more than three times that many weeks of paid vacation! All but two of my students said this was not only an excellent plan, but one that should be *more* generous. I couldn't be more grateful.

My week off was blissful. A few long walks, a lot of British period dramas, and much time spent communing with the plants, which are honestly starting to encroach on my living space a bit.

ZOOM SALONS

Of all the things I've added to my studio this year, by far the most popular with students has been the "Zoom Salon." These informal online gatherings started off as a way for students to have something—anything—to prepare for, with a special set of rules to encourage as many people to participate as possible.

- This is *not* a recital. It is a chance to play for other like-minded people and work on getting a piece in shape.
- Anyone is welcome to join and can play as little or as much as they want.
- Players can start over, skip a section, or bail out at the last minute with zero penalty.
- Adults are welcome to ingest liquid courage/post-performance celebratory libations.
- The environment is collegial, and conversation is encouraged between performances.

In our salon, we now have about a dozen musicians of all levels, mostly cellists and violists, from professionals to students with six months of lessons under their belts. It is incredibly grounding to hear people playing things they haven't perfected yet, and then to hear them again later, perhaps in recital or in a lesson or recording, having continued to improve. These salons have become warm, social, lighthearted quarterly occasions that give participants something that matters to practice for, but without the pressure and formality of a recital. I can't recommend them enough.

Horszowski Trio

COURTESY OF HORSZOWSKI TRIO

KEEPING IT TOGETHER

How are professional chamber ensembles coping with the challenges of COVID?

By David Templeton

Chamber music is, by definition, small, intimate, together—originally performed in palace chambers, where audience and musicians alike were in close proximity. During a pandemic in which social distancing is the key to remaining healthy and safe, "close proximity" is, of course, no longer a good thing. Though trios and quartets have an advantage over large orchestras in such times—given that it's perhaps somewhat simpler to keep three or four people safe than 100 or more—the commitment to keep rehearsing and performing as a chamber group during an epidemic is every bit as challenging.

"It's a balancing act," agrees Jesse Mills, violinist of the Horszowski Trio, which is based in New York City and named for the late pianist Mieczysław Horszowski, with whom the trio's pianist, Rieko Aizawa, studied as his final pupil. New to the ensemble is cellist Ole Akahoshi, who joined the Horszowski Trio in the middle of the pandemic. The ensemble's founding cellist, Raman Ramakrishnan, left the group last summer after nine years, to pursue other paths.

Maintaining the members' individual safety—and that of their families—while continuing to work as a trio requires a great deal of strategic give-and-take. "We have been consolidating our rehearsal periods throughout this COVID time, setting aside blocks where we rehearse frequently in and around the dates of our performances," says Mills. "We have been proactively getting COVID tests, and we're distancing ourselves with masks on as much as we can while trying to keep the air ventilated in our rehearsal spaces."

It's not a perfect system, he admits, but it allows the group to continue rehearsing while emphasizing safety. In the Horszowski Trio's case, they've been lucky to have done a lot more than just rehearse. Over the last year, the trio has performed a number of small-audience concerts, several live-streamed performances, and made some video recordings for various music series. The trio has performed pre-recorded concerts for Kaufman Music Center in New York, and Electric Earth Concerts in New Hampshire,

Del Sol Quartet

LENNY GONZALEZ

and has livestreamed a concert at Bard College's Longy School of Music in Massachusetts, where they are ensemble-in-residence. They've even done one high-profile performance through Dreamstage, music executive Thomas Hesse's pandemic-inspired tech startup that gives musicians a high-definition, livestreaming platform on which to deliver concerts to fans around the world.

Among the few live, in-person shows they've done was a unique concert sponsored by Howland Chamber Music Circle, which has collaborated with four other local presenters in upstate New York to start a new series together during the pandemic.

"They were specifically looking for artists who live together to perform at their venue with those presenters sitting in the balcony, far from the stage," Mills explains. "Thus, they weren't able to present our full trio for safety reasons. But our trio's pianist, Rieko Aizawa, is also my wife—so we played a duo recital there in November. We very much appreciated those five presenters working so hard for live music."

That concert was recorded and is still available to view online.

While Mills says he is excited about the vaccines now being rolled out, he doesn't anticipate a return to normal anytime soon. "We are hopeful that there is light at the end of this long, dark tunnel," he says, "but we do know that audiences are not going to come back immediately."

The trio's long-scheduled performance at Music from Kohl Mansion in Burlingame, California was to take place in May, he points out as an example, and the venue just recently requested that the Horszowskis submit a video recording in place of the planned concert.

"We are treating this as an opportunity to produce quality media," he says. "And one positive is that the music will be available for viewing more than once . . . perhaps well into the future. This could turn out to be a good way for artists and presenters to reach a wider audience, to connect with more people who usually can't make it to live concerts. We all have to adapt to this new world of the merging of live and virtual music. There's really no sense in avoiding that fact, and we might as well enjoy it in all the ways that we can."

"After the initial confusion and lockdown and everything, we actually got back to work pretty quickly," says violist Charlton Lee of the Del Sol Quartet, based in San Francisco. "We're fortunate that we've got a fairly big space to rehearse in, with a ceiling that goes up a couple of levels. So, we got some air filters, we use our masks and keep our distance, and we've been rehearsing and working."

Founded in 1992, Del Sol Quartet has focused primarily on the works of living composers. The other members are cellist Kathryn Bates, violinist Samuel Weiser, and violinist Benjamin Kreith. Before COVID, the foursome took turns hosting rehearsals, but since March, all rehearsals have been at Lee's high-ceilinged home. The group, already

Calidore String Quartet

MARCO BORGGREVE

accustomed to doing online performances, was up and running with livestreamed shows fairly early on in the shutdown.

"Then we launched this new initiative called the Joy Project," Lee says, describing Del Sol's ambitious effort to commission composers to write short pieces about joy. "The pieces have come out with a broadly and widely spread range of styles and expressions, from jubilant to meditative and thoughtful. The idea was that we would take these pieces outdoors and share them safely with the public in our communities."

The theme of joy was purposefully chosen as an antidote to the fear, uncertainty, and negative emotions running high throughout the country.

"We thought, we need to do something to cheer people up," he says. Since then, Del Sol has given nearly 30 outdoor performances. "It's been very rewarding," he says. "We do these outside, so a lot of people stumble across our performances accidentally, which is sometimes pretty powerful. A lot of people immediately start to cry, just from hearing live music for the first time in months."

"We were in Bernal Heights, a neighborhood in San Francisco," says Bates, "and we'd been planning on playing near the Bernal Boulder, which is an important landmark in that neighborhood. But it was so windy, there was just no way. So we were sort of scouting for a new place to play, and this man saw us with our instrument cases, and he started following us. He asked, 'Are you going to play music?' and then he stuck around, and the entire time he was standing there crying. Afterwards he told us how grateful he was, that what we'd given was the best gift he'd been given since COVID started. That's why we are doing this. Our community needs an infusion of joy right now."

The quartet has collected dozens of similar stories since beginning the Joy Project, which is ongoing, with more commissions still expected to be delivered in coming months. When performing outdoors, of course, all safety protocols are observed, including masks and positioning of the quartet members, playing a safe distance away from all observers and listeners.

Such gigs do little to pay the bills of course. Like most ensembles during this time, Del Sol has seen its income drop precipitously, but has found a number of ways to stay afloat, from small paid streaming gigs—including a collaboration with the Library of Congress—to establishing an account with Patreon, the online platform that allows "patrons" to pledge monthly donations to artists of all kinds.

"It's a combination of things, mostly a lot of community support," Lee allows. "We have been getting increased donations and grants, and even taking out loans, which is scary, but hopefully a necessary buffer to help us bridge the gap until we can return to playing some paying concerts again."

Until then, there are always new projects to be working on, even if the circumstances demand innovation and, in some cases, adaptation. With no possibility of

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recording in a studio, the members have been experimenting with home recordings, both audio and video. Among the more high-profile of these undertakings was the premiere of Huang Ruo's string quartet "A Dust in Time," which Del Sol performed live in November from the iconic labyrinth at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral.

"'A Dust in Time' is an hour-long piece Huang wrote during this COVID time," Lee says. "It's based on the Tibetan Buddhist sand mandalas, the idea being that you are constructing something and then removing it again, in a kind of intentional meditation. It's a reminder that this too will pass."

The performance was livestreamed and recorded, and the video will be made available to the public sometime in 2021.

"One thing we've noticed," adds Bates, "is that by doing online concerts and activities, our fan base across the world can tune in. We are much more deeply connected with our community right now than we are when we are touring, because we can only be in one city at a time." It's been a nice way, the group has learned, of connecting with people who care about what they are doing, without the usual limits of geography. "In this moment, thinking about our global community, how to connect with and bring joy to them—even during this kind of awful time—has been a good way to stay grounded, and to remember what and who we are doing this for."

For violinist Jeffrey Myers, of the Calidore String Quartet, one of the ways the ensemble is staying safe is through regular testing for COVID. "In fact, I just got back from a test this morning," he says. "Testing is part of the life of a working musician, part of the protocols we set up to operate under. But I get to play music, and to stay safe—and keep others safe—and the testing now and then is just part of the price for that."

Formed in 2010 at the Colburn School in Los Angeles, the Calidore Quartet—the name combining a portion of "California" with the French word "doré," meaning "golden"—has been the grand prize winner of dozens of chamber-music competitions across the country. In addition to Myers, the quartet includes Ryan Meehan on violin, Jeremy Berry on viola, and Estelle Choi on cello. The Calidores are currently the quartet-in-residence at the University of Delaware, and released a new album, *Babel*, last October.

According to Myers, the coronavirus and its subsequent quarantines were a major disruption, one that took a while to recover from, especially given that they'd been doing between 80 and 100 concerts a year until everything stopped.

"The quartet didn't rehearse at all for about the first three or four months of the pandemic, and that was really kind of shocking to us," he says. "I decided to leave and go back to stay with my parents in Ohio for a few months. Till then, the longest the quartet had been apart in ten years had been maybe a month or so, when one of us went on

vacation or something. We are always on the road together, so when touring stopped, when making music together stopped, it really was a shock to the system."

The first time the quartet reunited was in June.

"That was a special thing, one I think we will always remember," Myers allows. "Having been apart for so long, I think it made us appreciate how much we have; we will never take that for granted."

Because violist Jeremy Berry is the son of a pulmonologist on the COVID team in Bellingham, Washington, the Calidores had some strong medical support in developing the safety protocols they now use regularly. "I always drive when I go to Ohio, rather than fly, to minimize my exposure," Myers says. "When we are apart for a couple of weeks, like we were over the holidays, we all get tested before we travel to come back, then we get tested again five days after we arrive, so we're all ready for rehearsals once the negative results come in."

The quartet's rehearsal times have been carefully established so the musicians, who all live in upper Manhattan and use public transportation, can avoid the more crowded rush hour commutes. They also wear masks whenever rehearsing or performing together. "That was a real learning curve," he says wryly. "The hardest part was learning to communicate, while playing, when your face is covered. There is a lot of communication that takes place on your face when you perform music, so to have that be partially covered up was a challenge. We've found ways around it by using our eyes more, and developing a system of audible, somewhat exaggerated breathing that we use to communicate with each other."

During the summer, the ensemble was able to perform outdoors at such venues as Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts in Katonah, New York. "The concerts don't look like they used to, obviously, but everyone is working hard to find ways to make it work," Myers says. "Some presenters are now asking for pre-recorded content instead of live, onsite performances, so we've turned Jeremy's living room into a recording studio. We've had to learn a lot about video editing on the fly. Another steep learning curve, but we've managed."

Myers admits that the lessons of COVID may take a long time to process and fully understand, and that when it's finally over, there will likely be negative memories along with innovations and new talents they'll all be glad to have acquired.

The biggest change, he says, will probably be the most personal: a deeper understanding of why music is so important to so many. "For the Calidore Quartet, and for many other musicians we know and associate with, any chance we get to make music together is really treasured now," Myers acknowledges. "I don't think, when things return to normal, we will ever look at this gift we have—the gift of making music together as a group—in quite the same way." ■

BEETHOVEN VIOLIN CONCERTO/ 2 ROMANCES
Warner Classics

TO BEETHOVEN WITH LOVE

Midori records the maestro's Violin Concerto and a pair of Romances for violin and orchestra

By Greg Cahill

Midori

FABRICE UMIGLIA/WARNER CLASSICS

Talk about perfect timing. In March, just before the coronavirus pandemic shut down concert halls and recording studios around the world, the violinist Midori marked the 250th anniversary of Ludwig von Beethoven's birth by recording his Violin Concerto, complemented by his two Romances for violin and orchestra. The recording sessions had originally been planned around a performance with the orchestra at the KKL Lucerne Culture and Congress Centre, and subsequent concerts in the UK, Singapore, China, and Korea, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused the postponement of the entire tour—the Swiss concert was cancelled with less than 48 hours' notice.

Midori and the orchestra were already in the midst of rehearsals.

"As everyone's health and safety were of paramount concern, we were naturally obliged to follow official guidance," she notes. "Nonetheless, we were grateful to receive permission to move ahead with our recording. Just beyond, a new and dangerous world was lurking—if still in hiding—and I now realize that there was not much of an idea amongst us of a new reality coming into being. In retrospect, the recording experience felt as if we were racing against the clock, to still be making live music, in direct company of each other, breathing in harmony. Through all of that, Beethoven guided my colleagues and me, his work focusing and inspiring us, our concentrations heightened, enveloped together in our musical efforts.

"Beethoven has provided a fortunate focus for me in such fraught times. I am

reminded that he was a man of strong beliefs and a morality to which he fully committed as an activist who took firm stands on many major issues of his day. At the same time, he maintained the discipline that allowed him to create profoundly beautiful, often serene music, despite his many personal disappointments and struggles."

The resulting album, on the Warner Classics label, features Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61, on which Midori plays the Kreisler cadenzas, as well as Romance for Violin and Orchestra in G major, Op. 40, and Romance for Violin and Orchestra in F major, Op. 50.

Upon the album's release, *Strings* caught up with Midori in New York City, where she had been quarantining with family members.

> "Beethoven has provided a fortunate focus for me in such fraught times."

You began the recording before the pandemic and were able to finish it after the tour was cancelled. The threat of the virus must have been prevalent during the recording sessions. What was the impact?
We recorded the CD as the pandemic was beginning to sweep across Europe, and just as lockdowns were being instituted. We were already in Lucerne rehearsing for the concert and the recording, which were to happen simultaneously. However, the concert—deemed a "public gathering"—was called off by the government the day before it was to take place. Because the recording was not considered a public gathering, we were given permission to go ahead with it, and we were able to capture the performance we had prepared but were not able to share with an audience.

Beethoven's music, 250 years after his birth, continues to inspire and provide solace in troubled times. Why do you think that is?
Beethoven was and is one of us and amongst us—his music speaks, with the utmost sincerity, of struggle and love, which are integral to the human experience.

How does his music touch you?
His music, of course, leaves me in awe, for the courage and inspiration it emits, and it keeps me warm at heart.

You had recorded Beethoven just once before, the Violin Sonata No. 8, early in your career. Why did you decide to return to Beethoven, particularly these three works, at this time?
2020 was supposedly the year "we" were celebrating Beethoven. In retrospect—we came all too quickly to the year-end, which is, of course, human construct. I feel that he and his many composer and creator colleagues have actually come to rescue "us" and help us get through this challenging time. The recording was not long in the planning. It was supposed to be a recording of a tour with the Festival Strings Luzerne, and the repertoire for the tour was Beethoven.

Op. 61 was not well received when it premiered in 1806 but has become much-loved after its revival in 1844 with the then 12-year-old Joachim playing for an orchestra conducted by Mendelssohn. What is it that appeals to you about the concerto?
Its beauty.

How has the quarantine impacted you? How do you pass the time?
I certainly think I have learned more about using technology in the last six months than in all the rest of my life! My teaching has all been online, and although being online is not the same as being with someone in person, I am very grateful that it has been possible for me to continue on with certain aspects of these "normal" activities. A big part of those activities is the work I do through my nonprofit organizations, all of which aim to bring music and people together in meaningful ways and to create positive change in people's lives. Usually, that keeps me traveling much of the time, but during COVID, we've had to reimagine just about all of those in-person appearances, workshops, and performances as online events or create shareable video or audio content that can be used offline. Keeping those programs going in whatever way we can has been very important for me, because I think people need this now more than ever. For example, I generally visit a few youth orchestras over the course of a year to teach and to keep the young people, who may or may not wind up in music as a profession, inspired and engaged.

This year, during the pandemic, we're offering a special support program for youth orchestras with workshops online. In another program, I travel to schools in Japan to provide access to high-quality classical music and share the beauty and power of it with them. Because the internet can be spotty in Japan, streaming is really not an option. Instead, we're creating content for a podcast-like program, especially for schools and other social institutions. The goal is to spark their interest and to keep the music alive and accessible for the people involved. So, there is less traveling, but I am as busy as ever, maybe even more so. It's only on very rare occasions—literally only a couple of times in recent months—I have been able to enjoy a socially distanced, in-person, café catching-up-with-friends time, and these in-person interactions have been precious.

Of course, there is always practicing. But now I have an added motivation, knowing that once the lockdowns lift, so much healing will need to happen, and I want to hit the ground running in terms of both concert performances and my humanitarian work.

The future of live concerts is uncertain. What's next for you?
Through good times and bad, I continue to live a life of commitment and dedication and remain open to reaching out and to being reached. My hope is to always be actively involved in living life to its fullest, whether that's music, education, family and friends, humanitarian work, or learning. I want to participate in the work that will bring healing to a world that needs it now so desperately, and to actively involve more and more people in making positive change in the world. ■

TOUCH HARMONIOUS
In a Circle Records

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

Violist Nicholas Cords offers comfort and connection with his new solo release

By Thomas May

"I migrated to viola because I sensed that it was closer to my own internal voice," says Nicholas Cords as he talks about *Touch Harmonious*, the violist's follow-up to his debut solo recording, *Recursions* (both released on In a Circle Records—the label established by violinist Johnny Gandelsman, his colleague from Brooklyn Rider). "Because of its flexibility and ability to move from the middle voice to bass or soprano, the viola has a unique perspective, a bird's-eye view of the music, which is why I feel some of the great composers made the viola their instrument of choice." The viola is flexible not only in its range but also "in what kinds of literal voices or other instruments it might embody," Cords adds. "It's cloaked in a way."

While he has appeared on several recordings in recent years with Brooklyn Rider and the Silkroad Ensemble (he is a member and former co-artistic director), this latest endeavor arrives mid-pandemic—after a hiatus of seven years since Cords' solo debut—spotlighting his musical personality at its most virtuosic and at the same time intimate.

Nicholas Cords

ERIN BAIANO

His insightful work as a curator is likewise on display in the album's guiding threads. *Touch Harmonious* juxtaposes music from the Baroque with Britten and a cluster of contemporary works, including two premiere recordings. Even with J.S. Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 on the menu, this is an album of discoveries—the viola's "unique perspective" offering an unaccustomed encounter with the familiar masterwork. As Cords writes in his booklet essay, "*Touch Harmonious* is a celebration of the balming font of musical tradition as seen through the particular gaze of the viola."

What made you decide to return to solo recording for the first time since 2013?

To what extent did the pandemic influence the project?

I'd been thinking of this recording for a number of years and had put it into action before the lockdown, starting about three years ago. Sometimes you want to do the thing that is not the thing that you always do—in this case, a truly solo project instead of the collaborative music-making I usually do. Part of the reason to do that is simply growth and exploration. That's the spirit that I wanted to bring to this recording. But I don't think I could have finished it had my career just gone on as normal, since I never have the time.

I was about halfway through the recording when the pandemic hit, and then was given the

opportunity to finish and make adjustments to what I had been thinking programmatically. So the album straddles those two worlds. I was able to let the current moment loosely inform things. I ran across an epitaph by Samuel Johnson [from 1740, about the itinerant musician Claudy Philips] where I found the phrase "touch harmonious" [from the first line, "Philips, whose touch harmonious could remove/The pangs of guilty power and hapless love!"].

So this idea of the power of music to remove pangs became a focus: the pangs could be what Johnson talks about or the pangs of a pandemic. Music has this power to remove those things at least momentarily, to remove stress and to help us find calm. This recording is not meant to be an in-memoriam to the departed of COVID, but as I was going along, part of it became a matter of how I find my own comfort and power. Exploring the sound of the viola is one way; another is to realize that music is part of a tradition and continuum where we are connected to the past in an unbroken way.

The new recordings on this album seem to reflect this belief in the creative potential of that tradition. How do the new pieces here relate to the works you include from the Baroque era?

I used the Baroque as the starting point because that really is the beginning of modern string playing per se and of these great traditions of people who wrote virtuosic works for stringed instruments. The idea of the inexorable life of a tradition that is centuries old, that has been through pandemics and plagues and depression and all kinds of horrors, is comforting to me.

I personally commissioned the pieces by Dana Lyn [*endlessly i would have walked*] and Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky [*Short Epitaph* for two violas], which were generously supported by friends of mine. I wanted these to be related to the Baroque period in some way. Dana is a Brooklyn-based violinist and composer who studied classical music but went to Ireland to live for ten years and became an Irish fiddler. She also studied counterpoint and loves Bach. Dmitri lives in Uzbekistan and has written pieces for Silkroad. He based his piece (which has no relation to the Johnson) on the La Folia chord progression in an ingenious way, so you wouldn't know it at first hearing from the surface.

***Touch Harmonious* is about bridging time then—from the Baroque to the present. But it's also about bridging different stringed instruments, since many of the choices involve transcriptions for viola.**

I think transcription is what we are actually doing all the time. Think of Schubert's "Death and the Maiden," where he takes a song and reimagines it in the release of the string quartet. So many pieces of Bach reuse material from other sources. We have a long tradition of composers who sanction transcribing their work for another instrument—Brahms made his own transcriptions of clarinet pieces for viola, and Elgar even conducted the viola version of his Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85, transcribed by Lionel Tertis. It's an extremely porous border to move between these instruments.

> "The idea of the inexorable life of a tradition that is centuries old, that has been through pandemics and plagues and depression and all kinds of horrors, is comforting to me."

How would you describe experiencing the viola version of Bach's Cello Suite No. 1?

Generally speaking, Bach was being rather experimental when he wrote these cello suites, using the instrument as a contrapuntal and harmonic instrument. The viola is a less-resonant instrument, so in a way the listener has to work a little harder—or perhaps the viola player has to work harder. I think the viola is able to separate the idea of the middle and upper voices quite interestingly. It's that bird's-eye view—the viola does that a lot in the string quartet.

You give a nod to the vocal side of the Baroque with your choice of Handel's "Lascia ch'io pianga" from *Rinaldo*. And you use an unusual find here—the transcription made by the contemporary composer Toshio Hosokawa.

I always try to have a multicultural element in the programming, and the Handel communicates that well: here is a German composer writing in the Italian language for singers in an opera that takes place in Jerusalem, but in a viola arrangement created by a Japanese composer. So the story travels in time and distance. You also see this with the Britten selection [Cello Suite No. 3], which was inspired by Rostropovich but also by Bach and Baroque forms. And the reference to the Russian *Hymn to the Departed* is another way of trying to tie in this idea of the current moment. When I program, I like to have layers that connect on the surface and underneath the surface as well.

What attracts you to your instrument, which was built by Patrick Robin in 2019?

I have a real love for the modern craft of instrument making, which is a parallel to what I'm talking about in terms of tradition. There are great instrument makers alive who are working with a template from tradition. Patrick, who lives right on the Loire River in France, made this instrument for me and another right next to it for Tabea Zimmermann. Patrick's instruments have a more flexible and pliable sound—also a slightly darker sound. The bow I use is a Pierre Simon from the 19th century. So I play a new instrument with an old bow, which also relates to the topic.

What do you want the listener to come away with?

What I want in the end and what I felt reasonably happy to have achieved is that the recording works aesthetically and instinctually for the listener to have this transportive experience. I don't like the word "escape," but I hope it reaches people immediately without having to think too deeply about the connections. ■

OSVALDO GOLIJOV: FALLING OUT OF TIME
Silkroad Ensemble
(In a Circle Records)

A TALE OF GRIEF

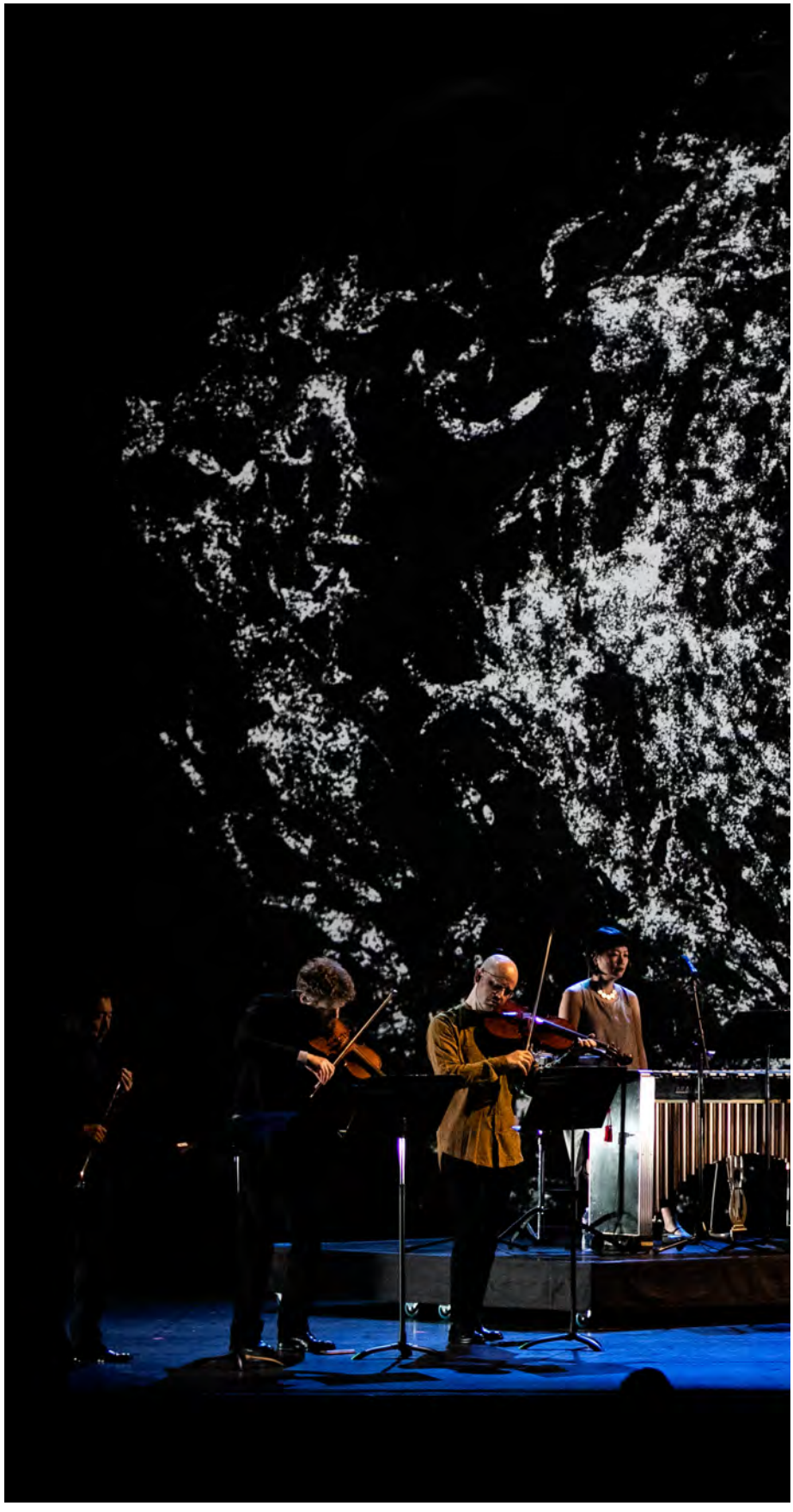
Silkroad delivers a heartbreaking performance of Golijov's 'Falling Out of Time'

By Miranda Wilson

Falling Out of Time, Osvaldo Golijov's long-awaited return to composition after more than a decade's recording silence, is a song cycle on poetic texts by the Israeli writer David Grossman. This new disc, created in collaboration with the Silkroad Ensemble, tells the unbearably sad tale of a father's grief with a mixture of avant-garde vocals, electroacoustic music, classical and rock instruments, and non-Western instruments such as the Chinese *sheng*, a woodwind instrument, and *pipa*, a bowed stringed instrument.

Singer Wu Tong, as the bereaved father, and Biella Da Costa, as the wife who refuses to join him, bend their voices into a virtuoso range of extended techniques—helped along by electronic manipulations of the sound. Walking obsessively in circles, the anguished father asks the central questions of the narrative, "Where are you? What are you? And how are you there?" to the ghostly, dreamlike accompaniment of strings and Chinese instruments. The effect is extraordinary and harrowing.

Silkroad



MAX WHITTAKER

At around an hour and a quarter's running time, this disc is not an easy listen. The painful subject matter and the nonstop intensity of Golijov's music leave the listener awed and overwhelmed. In the hands of the renowned Silkroad Ensemble, already one of the world's top new-music groups, Golijov's return has the perfect interpreters.

NOW MORE THAN EVER
Katie McNally Trio
(self-released)

With her trio's debut album, *The Boston States*, Katie McNally delivered a love letter to Cape Breton fiddling, a percussive style of playing that traces its roots to 19th-century Scotland.

On *Now More Than Ever*, McNally's second release with pianist Neil Pearlman and viola player Shauncey Ali, she tackles a mix of traditional and self-penned strathspeys, reels, and fiddle tunes. The trio's tight structures and organic interplay remain grounded in tradition while breaking new ground.

McNally's crunching—the grit of bow scaping strings—on "Lament for the Red Ladder/Francis the Miller" might sound familiar to a Cape Bretoner. Not so with Pearlman's syncopated jazz piano, but these two disparate styles entwine seamlessly, knitted by Ali's lowing viola.

McNally and Ali penned the medley "June's Right Arm/Cape Town Hustle," where McNally's giddy fiddle takes flight over Pearlman's cartwheeling keyboards and the bagpipe drone of Ali's viola. On "Bearcat Waltz," tinkling piano segues into sharp bowing and scampering skirls as McNally alternates between the three-note slurs of Irish-style fiddling and the emphatic stutter of the Cape Breton lift. The trio kicks up their own ceilidh with a medley of originals, "Compliments to Bob McIntyre/Humours of Westport/Lad O'Beirne/Hommage a Leanne Hebert," where whiplash fiddle tumbles into sawing viola and ragtime-inspired piano.

Throughout *Now More Than Ever*, McNally, Pearlman, and Ali stay true to their Cape Breton and Scottish roots, while stretching out into bluegrass, pop, and jazz. They're tracing a far more expansive fiddling family tree that can only be called American.

—*Pat Moran*

ANNA CLYNE: MYTHOLOGIES
Jennifer Koh, violin; BBC Symphony Orchestra, Marin Alsop, cond. (Avie)

Mythologies kicks off with the symphonic sweep of *Masquerade*, a sprawling orchestral fantasia commissioned in 2013 by the BBC to open the "Last Night" of the Proms. It's marked by a cinematic swirl of strings that propels the listener into the five individual works on this disc, which play like movements of a scintillating symphony.

Anna Clyne, 40, honed her craft on electroacoustic music. She is a Grammy-nominated British composer and cellist with an uncanny knack for penning melodies that sound both old and new. On these works, recorded for BBC Radio between 2011 and 2018, she teams with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, under Marin Alsop, and Jennifer Koh on solo violin. Clyne's dynamic sound can range from pastoral to turbulent, marked by sudden mood swings, but never jarring. The forward drive of *Masquerade*, evoking an exuberant spirit and stirring the imagination, is continued on *The Midnight Hour*, a 2015 commission by the Seattle Symphony and Orchestre national d'Île-de-France. Those mood swings also inform the dramatic *Night Ferry*, a 2012 Chicago Symphony Orchestra commission designed to complement Franz Schubert's own stormy emotions.

> "The turbulence forms a sonic hurricane that surrounds a solitary violin rising above the morass."

The Seamstress is a work written for violin. Inspired by personal loss, it opens with a dark, fiddle-like folk melody played in the low registers before resolving into high acrobatics. Clyne retains her command of melody throughout. The closer, <<*rewind*, is a forceful orchestral work underpinned by a flurry of violins and punctuated by the types of eerie slides commonly heard on electronic work. The turbulence forms a sonic hurricane that surrounds a solitary violin rising above the morass. It's the perfect conclusion to an exhilarating collection of new orchestral works from one of the best young composers of our time.

—*Greg Cahill*

PER NØRGÅRD AND POUL RUDERS: WORKS FOR SOLO CELLO
Wilhelmina Smith, cello
(Ondine)

Wilhelmina Smith's recital of virtually unrecorded solo cello music by veteran Danish composers Per Nørgård (b. 1932) and Poul Ruders (b. 1949) could go into any 21st-century cellist's performance repertoire. It is an impressive follow-up to her Ondine recording of Salonen and Saariaho.

Over the course of Nørgård's three sonatas, the technical and musical challenges skyrocket in intensity and difficulty. While there is tangible heartbreak in the Solo intimo opening movement of No. 2, written in 1953, Nørgård's language becomes more disjunctive and he throws in harmonics of fiendish difficulty. He reaches further in the second movement, Solo in scèna, written in 1980, lit by glorious glissandi, but no matter the language all three sonatas sound as if Nørgård had just sat down at his cello and played some magical unbroken stream of musical thought. Which makes Smith's success in making music so precisely calculated sound as if it had been written that way all the more remarkable.

In Ruder's *Bravourstudien*, written in 1976 for Morten Zeuthen, the affecting folk melody "L'homme armé" of Middle Ages fame runs through an Overture and nine variations with titles from music history that have such purely musical content that the composer feels compelled to remind us occasionally with a bravura flourish or an intoxicating run that they're études too, including studies in double-stops and C-string textures and sonorities.

Judith Sherman produced the recording sessions at Hamline University in St. Paul,

Minnesota, capturing Smith's passionate virtuosity with achingly personal intimacy. Søren Schauser's liner notes provide an excellent guide to the music's compositional inner workings.

—Laurence Vittes

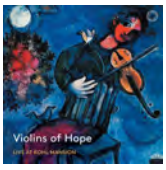
METAMORPHOSEN: STRAUSS CHAMBER WORKS
Oculi Ensemble
(Champs Hill Records)

Metamorphosen is the debut recording of the Oculi Ensemble, a group of mostly British string players drawn variously from the Badke, Doric, Piatti, Navarra, Albion, and Idomeneo quartets. The size of the ensemble permits the performance of larger-scale chamber works by Richard Strauss, some of which will be unfamiliar to many listeners.

The opening track, the string sextet Prelude to *Capriccio*, drops us right into the Oculi's gorgeous, ultra-romantic sound blend. A *Quartettsatz* fragment provides a tantalizing, 42-measure glimpse at a string quartet that never materialized. Strauss' very early String Quartet, Op. 2—written at the ripe old age of 16—shows an unexpectedly Haydnesque side to the composer, while a picturesque *Ständchen* from the same era recalls Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*.

The dramatic centerpiece of this project is, of course, the arrangement for string septet of Strauss' *Metamorphosen* by Rudolf Léopold. It seems extraordinary that a piece originally for 23 players could work so well with just seven. The Oculi Ensemble pulls it off magnificently, playing with broad, generous bow strokes, impeccable ensemble, and near-operatic levels of vibrato for this cathartic, crepuscular piece. Their luxuriant style seems almost to belong to another time, perhaps the "golden age" of the Busch and Budapest Quartets. It's to be hoped that this disc will be the first of many projects.

—Miranda Wilson



VIOLINS OF HOPE: LIVE AT KOHL MANSION
Daniel Hope, violin
(Pentatone)

Father-and-son Israeli luthiers Amnon and Avshalom Weinstein founded the Violins of Hope project to restore stringed instruments that had been played by Jewish musicians before and during the Holocaust, including some that had been used in Nazi concentration camps. British violinist Daniel Hope has devoted the past decade to help educate audiences about the role these instruments played in that dark chapter of history. This live concert album, recorded at the Kohl Mansion in Burlingame, California, finds Hope performing along with a string quartet comprising Kay Stern (first violin), Dawn Harms (second violin), Patricia Heller (viola), and Emil Miland (cello). The tracks include Schubert's moody *Quartettsatz* in C minor, D. 703, and Mendelssohn's String Quartet No. 6 in F minor, Op. 80, a requiem for his deceased sister Fanny. But it is the world-premiere recording of Jake Heggie's *Intonations: Songs from the Violins of Hope* (with text by Gene Scheer)—with the aforementioned players, plus violinist Sean Mori and mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke—that is of greatest interest. Each of the seven movements features one or more of the restored Holocaust instruments and is composed to express the unique story of that instrument. For example, "Exile" evokes the plight of Erich Weininger, who, during his ocean voyage from Germany to Palestine, faced the possibility that his cherished violin would be thrown into the ship's boiler to provide fuel for the last leg of his journey. Ultimately, this hi-definition SACD-format recording celebrates resistance to authoritarianism and the resilience of the Jewish people.

> "Each of the seven movements features one or more of the restored Holocaust instruments and is composed to express the unique story of that instrument."

—Greg Cahill

SCHUBERT: INS STILLE LAND
Signum Quartett
(Pentatone)

The deeply personal nature of Schubert's enormous output of songs provides a compelling reason to set the composer's chamber music into the story of his life by programming songs alongside his string quartets. The Cologne-based Signum Quartett (Florian Donderer and Annette Walther, violins; Xandi van Dijk, viola; and Thomas Schmitz, cello) goes one better by playing seven songs transcribed for quartet by their violist and two quartets written ten years apart: the mostly lighthearted D. 74 in D major and the mostly grim D. 810, "Death and the Maiden." Broadly speaking, the quartet has selected and juxtaposed the songs and quartets to show the composer's developing sense of alienation and death; in doing so, they suggest an affecting new way of playing and listening to Schubert.

As if they were singers themselves, the quartet in the transcriptions plays with a sensitivity and attention that seems to carry over to their playing of the quartets. This results not only in substantially more involved playing but in ancillary benefits, such as making the first violin's intonation more secure in exposed passages, like the Trio of "Death and the Maiden," giving more weight to the big trenchant moments, and getting the speed, pulse, and energy of the last ten seconds of the Presto exactly right.

You might want to first listen to the 15 tracks as if Schubert composed them to be played that way. Then read the absorbing liner notes by Wellesley professor Charles Fisk, who wrote *Returning Cycles: Contexts for the Interpretation of Schubert's Impromptus and Last Sonatas*. The notes constitute an extraordinary narrative of the man, the music, and the words. Prepare for a deeply moving experience.

Recorded in the Sendesaal Bremen, the sound has exhilarating power, clarity, and an appropriately warm Schubertian ambience.

—Laurence Vittes

STRINGS
SUMMER STUDY GUIDE

Advertiser Index

TAKING OFF THE CLAMPS

There are so many wonderful moments in making an instrument, but the best was introduced to me in kindergarten

COURTESY OF FRANCIS KUTTNER

Do you remember when you were in kindergarten and your teacher taught you how to glue popsicle sticks together, perhaps even making your very own paste glue and somehow binding the two sticks with a rubber band, a weight, or a clothes peg? I do. There was this marvelous feeling when somehow two pieces had become one. And I felt it when I took off that little clamp.

Planing a one-meter-long, two-inch-wide ribbon off the gluing edge of a seasoned maple cello back and watching it float down to your feet can be immensely satisfying. Unfortunately, while joining a cello back, this never happens. But taking off the clamps after successfully gluing the two halves in a perfect book-matched joint really sends me. It's one piece!

For some makers, the heating and bending of one-millimeter-thin ribs (you can see light through them!) so that they snugly fit around the violin form is a joy . . . until you accidentally touch the sizzling bending iron. Ouch. But when I unravel my clamping system that securely glues the ribs to their blocks, I get my first glimpse of the outline of my violin—its skeleton so to speak. Nice!

Carving the arching of the top and the back is a job I look forward to. Pushing my favorite, freshly honed gouge through dry wood as chips fly can be exhilarating. After about three hours it becomes less so. And then you have to scoop out the inside. Now come the tricky parts: the F-holes to be positioned and cut, the thicknesses made just right, and the bass bar fitted correctly. You are ready to glue. First the back to the rib assembly, then the label (also fun!), and finally the top goes on.

And now comes my favorite part.

I take off the spool clamps (60 or so if it's a cello), and, voila! It's a box! A musical box that I immediately thump with my middle knuckle, listening to its first percussive note. As satisfying as eating that popsicle so many years ago.

—Francis Kuttner, violin maker

Francis Kuttner

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