

MIDORI

"More than 30 years after bursting on the scene as a pint-size violin prodigy, Midori continues to set an example for how to be an engaged musician in the modern world."

– *San Francisco Chronicle*





MIDORI, violin
2024-2025 Biography

Midori is a visionary artist, activist and educator who explores and builds connections between music and the human experience. In the four decades since her debut with the New York Philharmonic at age 11, the “simply magical” (*Houston Chronicle*) violinist has performed with many of the world’s most prestigious orchestras and has collaborated with world-renowned musicians including Leonard Bernstein, Yo-Yo Ma, and many others.

This season, she performs a recital tour with pianist Özgür Aydin, appearing at the Edinburgh Festival; the 92nd Street Y, New York; the Celebrity Series of Boston; San Francisco Performances; and the Colburn Celebrity Series. Other highlights of Midori’s 2024–2025 season include appearances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Louisville Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, and Oklahoma City Philharmonic.

Outside the U.S., she performs with the Vienna Philharmonic under Andris Nelsons in Vienna and on tour in Japan and Korea (Prokofiev’s First Violin Concerto); she appears twice in the spring of 2025 at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall, with the German National Youth Orchestra in May, performing Glanert’s Second Violin Concerto, and with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (DSO) in June, performing Dvořák’s Violin Concerto. She also joins the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under Jonathan Nott, performing Sibelius’s Violin Concerto on a tour of Spain, and has concert appearances in Geneva, Köln and Nürnberg, as well as Mumbai, Istanbul, Izmir and Colombo.

Deeply committed to furthering humanitarian and educational goals, Midori has founded several non-profit organizations; the New York City-based Midori & Friends and Japan-based MUSIC SHARING have both been active for over three decades. For the Orchestra Residencies Program (ORP), which supports youth orchestras, Midori commissioned a new work from composer Derek Bermel, Spring Cadenzas, that was premiered virtually during the COVID lockdown and continues to be performed; this season, she is working on creating a video recording of the work to be accompanied by a tutorial. ORP also worked recently with the Afghan Youth Orchestra, which relocated to Portugal in order to continue operating. Midori’s Partners in Performance (PiP) helps to bring chamber music to smaller communities in the U.S. In recognition of her work as an artist and humanitarian, she serves as a United Nations

Messenger of Peace, and was named a Kennedy Center Honoree in 2021.

Born in Osaka in 1971, she began her violin studies with her mother, Setsu Goto, at an early age. In 1982, conductor Zubin Mehta invited the then 11-year-old Midori to perform with the New York Philharmonic in the orchestra's annual New Year's Eve concert, where the foundation was laid for her subsequent career. Midori is the Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and Artistic Director of Ravinia Steans Music Institute's Piano & Strings program. She is the recipient of honorary doctorates from Smith College, Yale University, Longy School of Music and Shenandoah University, and of the 2023 Brandeis Creative Arts Award from Brandeis University.

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Midori

Critical Acclaim



"More than 30 years after bursting on the scene as a pint-size violin prodigy, Midori continues to set an example for how to be an engaged musician in the modern world."

San Francisco Chronicle

"Midori's interpretation, in a word, was simply magical... No encore was needed; the audience was already speechless."

Houston Chronicle

"Midori's solos are crafted with beguiling naturalness – floating in the upper register, brawny in the lower – rhapsodic throughout. Everything speaks: dynamic contrasts are strongly etched, the score's lyrical lines and rhythmic gestures are beautifully matched between soloist and ensemble, and the culminating cadenza burns hot."

Arts Fuse

"Midori sailed through its treacherous technical challenges, taking her time to communicate its lyrical passages with breathtaking beauty. She phrased with emotion and a pure, sweet tone in the first movement, ending with ethereal sounds high in the stratosphere. Her playing was interior, and every note had meaning... It all seemed effortless. Yet no matter how intense the technical challenges, Midori's tone on her 1734 Guarnerius del Gesù violin was always one of beauty."

Cincinnati Enquirer

"Midori's is still the singular sound familiar from her long affiliation with the virtuosic standards: big, focused, strongly projected, uncannily smooth and consistent bowing across a broadband spectrum of volume and color."

Washington Post

"In making Bach's music her own, note by note, she has come closer to the composer than probably anyone before her."

Märkische Allgemeine

"Midori's muscular playing and virtuosic agility are a sight to behold. She gets into her performance with her entire physique, delving into her instrument as if she has to extract the sound from her 1734 Guarneri del Gesù by force."

San Francisco Classical Voice

"Midori is a violin superstar. The audience love her not only for her technical brilliance and flawless playing, but also her personality."

Die Rheinpfalz

"Midori's Bach is radically introverted, as if we could move around inside Bach's brain... She plays with a sparkling precision that is almost frightening, perfect as a Zen exercise. And yet, even as polished as her playing seems, it is never uniform. It breathes inwardly, painting the inner polyphony dreamily and accurately."

Kulturradio

MIDORI

the Strad

June 13, 2023

Midori takes up artistic director role at Ravinia Steans Music Institute

The violinist will head the institute's piano and strings programme beginning this autumn, succeeding Miriam Fried



Violinist Midori has been appointed artistic director of Ravinia Steans Music Institute (RSMI) piano and strings programme, effective from autumn 2023 to begin overseeing the 2024 summer season. Midori succeeds Miriam Fried, who has held the position since 1994, following the tenures of the late Robert Mann (1988) and Walter Levin (1989–93).

'I am very much looking forward to being involved in RSMI in this new capacity,' said Midori of her new

appointment. 'Working with young musicians has been central to my career, and this programme is one of the most important of its kind in the music field. It has been led for the last 30 years by Miriam Fried, and I am honoured to inherit her remarkable legacy as I lead the programme forward in the coming years.'

Midori's appointment comes as Fried prepares to welcome the 2023 cohort of piano and strings programme fellows for their residency from 19 June to 22 July, which will be Fried's 30th and final season as director of the programme.

'I would like to add my warmest welcome to Midori,' said Fried. 'In addition to her artistry, wisdom, and integrity, she brings her unending passion for music and the education of young people. The Steans Institute will be in wonderful hands.'

As the piano and strings artistic director, Midori will lead young professional violinists, violists, cellists, pianists, and members of pre-existing chamber groups through immersive and intensive rehearsals and coachings with a rotating roster of experienced teaching artists, including herself. The programme concentrates on interpretation and small-group collaboration through the practice and performance of classical sonata and chamber repertoire. The



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2024 programme takes place from 23 June to 24 July.

Midori marked the 40th anniversary of her professional debut during the 2022–23 season, celebrating her career that began in 1982, when she debuted with the New York Philharmonic at age eleven.

During this anniversary season, Midori released a new recording of the **complete Beethoven sonatas for piano and violin** with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet (Warner Classics). Another highlight has been a project that combines two lifelong passions—the music of Bach and newly commissioned music—in a national solo recital tour featuring Bach’s six sonatas and partitas for solo violin alongside works by contemporary composers, including an appearance at Carnegie Hall in February 2023.

Midori has founded several non-profit organisations to bring music to children and underserved communities. In recognition of her work as an artist and humanitarian, she serves as a United Nations Messenger of Peace, and in 2021, she was named a Kennedy Center Honoree.

Born in Osaka in 1971, she began her violin studies with her mother, Setsu Goto, at an early age. Midori is the Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and is a Distinguished Visiting Artist at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. She plays the 1734 Guarneri del Gesù ‘ex-Huberman’ violin and uses four bows – two by Dominique Peccatte, one by François Peccatte, and one by Paul Siefried.

MIDORI

San Francisco Examiner

February 1, 2023

Midori, world-astonishing violinist, descends on S.F. to play Bach

By Yoshi Kato

There's an elite list of classical musicians who are also part of popular culture, and violinist Midori's 2020 Kennedy Center Honor cemented her place on it. She made her professional debut at 11 with the New York Philharmonic and three years later performed Leonard Bernstein's "Serenade" at the Tanglewood Music Festival with the composer himself conducting. By her mid-teens, she was a full-time touring classical musician, with the Washington Post noting in 2012 that she was "perhaps the most celebrated child prodigy in modern times."

Now 51, Midori has performed with the world's major classical music institutions, from the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics to the London and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, as well as with other superstars such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, pianist Emanuel Ax and conductor Zubin Mehta. The Osaka native and longtime U.S. resident answered emailed questions by voice memo en route to her home in Philadelphia, discussing her upcoming pair of recitals for San Francisco Performances in which she'll tackle two diverse programs rooted in pieces Bach wrote for violin. The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

S.F. Performances' 2022-23 season is celebrating the 40th anniversary of your famed professional debut. Do you remember it?

When I first made my debut with the New York Philharmonic, it was in 1982 on New Year's Eve. I do remember what

it was like. I was very, very excited. Back then, I had so few opportunities to perform with an orchestra and it was such a special treat. I was so happy to be able to play and to make music and to collaborate with so many other musicians. And that's what I do remember about these early concerts — especially those with an orchestra.

With these solo programs, you'll be in a setting that's the complete opposite of being a soloist with a big orchestra. What's that like as a performer?

Doing a solo recital is actually a very unique experience, a unique feeling, to be alone completely. And most of the time, there isn't even another prop, so to speak. There's not a stand, and it's at times feeling so alone.

Yet that's also the beauty of it. Because the sounds that I hear and the sounds I can create are actually, indeed, what there is. And it's so pure, and it's so concentrated. And it's also something that makes one feel so responsible. But to create the sound, and the sound then surrounds me, it's absolutely unique.

Why did you choose different Bach sonatas for solo violin and violin partitas as the basis for both programs?

When I first did a Bach project over 10 years ago, I actually didn't include the contemporary works that are now being included this time around. For a long time, I've always made a point of performing Bach. And starting at a time when I was still early in my teaching



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position at USC, I made a point of having a special Bach celebration every year with all my students.

And I used to perform in the celebrations as well, while my students played either a sonata or partita or a pair of them or a trio of them, two or three works. And I started also playing multiple ones, as well. Through that experience, every year, I lived with Bach and would put the programs together. And somehow these groupings really found their own way to becoming a program.

And then the rest of each program consists of different contemporary works. Can you discuss that choice?

The contemporary works included in this cycle, these are all pieces that have been inspired or influenced in some way by the music of Bach or the idea of Bach. There is a very sort of natural connection with Bach in these pieces.

Are you in contact with these composers, or do you choose to interpret their compositions independently?

These composers are all living, and I've had varying degrees of communication with them. It's fantastic that, through technology, we're now able to reach out so easily and that, at the very least, I was able to communicate in writing with each of them.

Given his status as a musical maverick, John Zorn's "Passagen" (scheduled for Sunday afternoon) might be the most surprising of your selections. What can you share with us about that?

John Zorn's "Passagen" is an incredible piece of music. It's something I've really enjoyed practicing and learning. I also have opportunities to correspond and meet with John. That was a treat. And as he says in his own words, it's like the retrospective of violin works within this single piece with bits of Bartok, bits of Alan Berg. There's of course, Bach and also Paganini. Yeah, it's a lot of fun.

Finally, you've become nearly as well known for your educational and nonprofit work. How does that inspire your playing?

Through the nonprofit work that I do, through the educational work that I do and the accompanying UN Messenger of Peace designation, I think that my perspectives are constantly being challenged and expanded. And in very unique ways, they all come back to the music.

I'm not actually exactly trying to achieve certain experiences in order to have them influence my music. But in the end they end up influencing the music, I think, because music is so encompassing of my person, and my person is really so influenced by all my experiences.

MIDORI

the Strad

January 25, 2024

Violinist Midori receives Brandeis Creative Arts Award 2023-24

The violinist received the award in recognition of her visionary artistry in concert halls around the world, as well as her work with non-profit organisations and community outreach



The violinist, activist and educator Midori has received the 2023-24 Brandeis Creative Arts Award from Brandeis University, a private research university in Waltham/Boston, MA. Following a violin masterclass that she gave at the university on 1 December 2023, Midori received her award from president Ron Liebowitz on 18 January 2024 in the Slosberg Music Center and later gave a recital performance with pianist Ieva Jokubaviciute.

'Midori was selected because of her visionary artistry exhibited over decades of performances in the world's great concert halls and cultural centres,' said Neal Hampton, director of the Brandeis-Wellesley Orchestra and chair of the award's planning committee. The award was given to recognise her work through non-profit organisations, including Midori and Friends, which provides tuition-free music education programmes in New York City, and Partners in Performances, which brings chamber music to small communities around the US.

'A United Nations Messenger of Peace, and a Kennedy Center Honoree in 2021, Midori's dedication to building connections between music and the human experience makes her one of the most vital artists of our time,' concluded Hampton.

Midori has enjoyed a prolific international career since her debut with the New York Philharmonic a surprise guest soloist at the New Year's Eve Gala in 1982, aged 11. She has collaborated with numerous musicians, including Leonard Bernstein and Yo-Yo Ma. She was appointed artistic director of Ravinia Steans Music Institute's Piano & Strings programme in 2023, succeeding Miriam Fried.

Midori is the Dorothy Richard Starling chair in violin studies at the Curtis Institute of Music. She has received honorary doctorates from Smith College, Yale University, Longy School of Music and Shenandoah University. She plays the 1734 Guarneri 'del Gesù' 'ex-Huberman' and uses four bows – two by Dominique Peccatte, one by François Peccatte and one by Paul Siefert.

The Brandeis Creative Arts Award recognises excellence in the arts and the lives and works of distinguished, active American artists. The award was established in 1956, eight years after the founding of Brandeis University. The Creative Arts Award is made possible by the Poses Fund.



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MIDORI

CBS NEWS

June 3, 2021



For Kennedy Center Honoree Midori, playing music is all about learning, teaching

Violin virtuoso Midori, a former child prodigy compared to Mozart, is honored by the prestigious Kennedy Center. Her life of music is dedicated to teaching others, while she continues to learn herself. She speaks with Vladimir Duthiers about her career and the honor.



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The Washington Post

June 2, 2021

Noisy jets, secret performers and rooftop dancers: Inside the making of an unprecedented Kennedy Center Honors

By Peggy McGlone and Michael Andor Brodeur



The Kennedy Center Honors — with its secret list of performers and over-the-top production values — is a perennial highlight of Washington's arts scene. But the show's mystique grew to epic proportions this year, when the pandemic-delayed tribute to five popular artists became a supercharged symbol of the return of the performing arts.

Singer Joan Baez, country musician Garth Brooks, dancer-choreographer-actor Debbie Allen, violinist Midori and actor Dick Van Dyke were in town last

month for the 43rd production, a five-day event that included a visit to the White House, a formal medallion ceremony and two live performances May 20 and 22 before the first large crowds that the arts center has hosted in more than a year.

In between those events, the [Kennedy Center](#) became a TV soundstage, where more than a dozen tribute performances and segments were taped on location both inside and out. The result of this high-wire act is a two-hour special airing Sunday at 8 p.m. on CBS.



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The Washington Post had exclusive access to the making of the most complicated Honors event in its four-decade history. Covid-related restrictions forced Kennedy Center officials and White Cherry Entertainment producers to break the show into virtual and in-person pieces and stitch them together for broadcast. They also had to entertain two live audiences while keeping the spotlight on the honorees.

"If I had one agenda, it was that the honorees felt that they were really honored," Kennedy Center President Deborah Rutter said after the taping was completed. "The settings felt a little more intimate, the pressure was different. I loved seeing what I saw in each moment, knowing full well some of it was captured elsewhere."

In fact, almost half of the tributes — seen by 250 high-end donors on May 20 in the Concert Hall and another 250 on May 22 under a tent on the Reach Plaza — were previously taped in the center's lobbies and theaters, on its terraces and roof, and on the lawn and plazas outside. Some were reprised for the honorees, whose reactions are baked into the show's history; others were intended only for the live audiences.

That meant performing multiple versions of Van Dyke's signature tune, "Put on A Happy Face"; two singalongs of Brooks's hit, "Friends in Low Places"; and a couple of renditions of "Out Here on My Own," the torch song from Allen's TV series, "Fame." Allen's sister, the actress Phylicia Rashad, and actor-singer Aaron Tveit became ghost hosts, whose duties emceeding the live concerts were replaced by Gloria Estefan for TV. (Rashad returns to introduce her sister's video.)

"We challenged them to deliver a program worthy of the history and tradition of the Kennedy Center Honors. This is a once-in-a-lifetime moment for [the honorees]," said Jack Sussman, CBS executive vice president of specials, music, live events and alternative programming. "We don't want to be the team that under-delivers."

The TV version is unlike any previous rendition, with an opening featuring

interviews with the honorees and behind-the-scenes footage of crews taping the tribute performances as Estefan acknowledges the absence of audiences. The broadcast also shines a spotlight on the arts center itself. From cellist Yo-Yo Ma's lobby performance to the students dancing outside the Reach to violinist Hilary Hahn in the Concert Hall, TV viewers will see what a gem it is.

Starting in December, Kennedy Center officials and its producers planned the event on "parallel paths" that predicted what conditions might be in the spring, Sussman said. Early models devised ways to shoot completely remote, without some honorees attending. When it became likely that small crowds would be allowed, the producers pivoted to include two shorter shows for small audiences. The event raised \$3.5 million in donations, which was more than expected but significantly less than the typical \$6.5 million.

"We adapted creatively," Sussman said. "As the months went on, and the situation changes, you had to go with the flow. You had to challenge yourself and the team to be creative in the moment."

The production was also complicated by its multiple locations, some with natural light that changed as the day went on, some with ambient noise that could not be controlled, Sussman said. As an example, he pointed to the multiple-camera shot on the morning of May 18, when students from Midori's Orchestra Residencies Program and the Debbie Allen Dance Academy in Los Angeles performed together outside the Reach. Under a blue sky with Washington in the background, the students performed a medley that ended with the dancers kicking and spinning in the reflecting pool.

It was as big a splash as it could be — without an audience.

"We pulled back to show the crew, hear them reacting," Sussman said. "You give the audience what's real. You don't fake it."

Inside the 2,465-seat Concert Hall on May 20, Thomas Wilkins, music director of the Omaha Symphony and principal conductor of the Hollywood Bowl

Orchestra, limbered up the 38 members of the National Symphony Orchestra onstage with a melody that gave each honoree a nudge — some Mozart for Midori, some “Fame” for Allen, some Garth for Garth.

“As President Kennedy would say, we wanted to do this not because it was easy but because it was hard,” said Kennedy Center Board Chairman David M. Rubenstein from the stage in his opening remarks. He elicited a burst of applause upon specifying that the president, first lady and vice president had spent close to an hour with the honorees and expressed enthusiastic support for the Honors specifically and the Kennedy Center in general. What might have been boilerplate acknowledgment felt newly charged with unspoken significance. Former president Donald Trump had broken with tradition by not once attending the Honors or hosting the honorees at the White House.

Tveit introduced the nominees, who smiled over their masks from the upper boxes. And he smiled a bit wistfully, too, disclosing to the audience that the night’s performances — a suite of tributes to Midori, and individual salutes to the other four honorees — were the first he’d seen in person in 14 months.

“While some of these performances may not be exactly what you see [later] on TV,” he said, “they’re live, and they’re just for you.” Ecstatic applause followed as the same realization seemed to settle over everyone in the room.

Classical luminaries took the stage in a procession of powerhouse performances to a rapt Midori. The fast-rising young violinist Randall Goosby nimbly took on the third movement of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto with impossible speed and control. The duo of Gil Shaham and Adele Anthony performed Pablo de Sarasate’s “Navarra” as well as a run through of the second movement of Bach’s Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor, marking Midori’s lifelong love of the composer.

And to close the Midori programming, violinist Hilary Hahn offered a breathtaking account of the third

movement of Leonard Bernstein’s “Serenade” — which managed to avoid altogether the broken strings that launched Midori into the limelight when she fatefully played it under the composer’s baton at Tanglewood at the age of 14.

The program then shifted to feting the other honorees. Tony-winning singer and actress Anika Noni Rose lighted up every corner of “Out Here on My Own” with her soaring voice, Tveit offered an oddly somber run-through of “Put on a Happy Face” and country star Sturgill Simpson gave a brusque and brooding rendition of “House of the Rising Sun” as a gift to Joan Baez (who featured the song on her 1960 solo debut album). James Taylor, a 2016 honoree, had Garth Brooks out of his seat and fanning his cowboy hat through his version of Brooks’s “The River,” and Wilkins fired up the orchestra one last time for what turned into a closing singalong of “Friends in Low Places.”

On Friday, May 21, the on-location shooting continued right up until the evening’s formal presentation of the medallions. Estefan filmed her intros and outros in the late afternoon, forcing security to stop cars, pedestrians and bicyclists to keep them out of view. Yo-Yo Ma slipped in at around 6 p.m. to tape a tribute to Midori; at 7 p.m. he performed at the start of the medallion ceremony, which Estefan hosted on the Opera House stage.

The final performance, held outdoors on Saturday, May 22, began with the honorees taking center stage for the first of many standing ovations. They moved to their front-row, socially distanced seats, backed by about 250 guests, most casually dressed because of the outdoor setting and a show-time temperature of 84 degrees. Many shed their masks as the almost two-hour show began.

Kelly Clarkson earned the first “oohs” of the night when she took the stage for Brooks’s “The Dance.” Her a cappella intro was promptly marred for the live audience by an airplane, which would not be the last intrusion from overhead, but it couldn’t be heard on the tape. Country singer Jimmie Allen performed

“The Thunder Rolls” and “Friends in Low Places” and Gladys Knight brought the house down with her gospel-flavored “We Shall Be Free.”

“I like that song,” Knight told Brooks as she exited the stage. A good thing, since a loud helicopter forced a do-over. Knight’s second version was a little less fiery, while Brooks faithfully re-created his original reactions, first by jumping to his feet and then singing with the backup vocalists, his right hand raised in praise as if he were in church.

Rhiannon Giddens and Dirk Powell offered a traditional take on Baez’s “Silver Dagger,” while the medley of “Diamonds and Rust,” “God is God,” and “We Shall Overcome” by Mary Chapin Carpenter and Emmylou Harris brought Baez to the stage for hugs and thank yous — a lovely moment that is not possible when the honorees are seated in the traditional Opera House box.

The tented stage was smaller and lacked the changing sets of the Opera House, but what it lost in spectacle it gained in pace and cohesion. The video biographies were shortened, and the virtual congratulations — from Julie Andrews, Bette Midler, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Wayne Gretzky, Paula Abdul and many more — were sweet and seamless. The honorees were not visible to the audience (as they are for most of the orchestra in the Opera House), but their proximity to the performers sparked emotions that many in the audience could feel.

“It was really wonderful to have people there,” Sussman said, adding that several artists told him it was the first time they’ve performed before a live audience in more than a year. “That upped their game.”

Although Midori received the star treatment in the Concert Hall,

Saturday’s outdoor crowd still had their moment of salute, thanks to Paquito D’Rivera, who performed “Quasi-Bach” with pianist Alex Brown. “Midori, my love, you didn’t expect me, right?” said D’Rivera, who serves on the artistic advisory committee of Midori & Friends, the violinist’s nonprofit.

Pentatonix’s version of “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang” (performed for TV with Tviety) highlighted the song-and-dance salute to Van Dyke, which included Broadway star Laura Osnes performing “Jolly Holiday” from “Mary Poppins,” before Derek Hough joined her for “Put on A Happy Face.” Hough then led a team of dancers through a muscular “Step in Time” to the delight of the crowd. (TV audiences will see Hough and company performing this routine on the arts center’s roof.)

The final segment spotlighted Allen with numbers from “Sweet Charity” and “Fame,” performed by Ariana DeBose, Vivian Nixon (Allen’s daughter), Tiler Peck, Desmond Richardson and a troupe of dancers. A teary Allen rushed the stage as the final notes sounded and the audience rose for its last standing ovation.

Having reinvented the traditional show, Rutter and Sussman predicted some of the tweaks will live on. “We are now challenged to do other things,” Rutter said, although she stopped short of predicting another spring version. Plans for the next one in December are already underway, she reported. “I already had a text on Sunday about the 44th,” she said.

“We have now experienced what we can do. We’re not going back,” Sussman added. “We are going into the future, and we’re going to take the Kennedy Center honorees and the people honoring them with us.”

MIDORI

Los Angeles Times

January 13, 2021

A dance pioneer, a TV icon and music stars: Here are the 2021 Kennedy Center honorees

By Nardine Saad



A few California artists are getting their due at the 43rd Kennedy Center Honors, even if it's a little late because of the pandemic.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on Wednesday released its list of 2021 honorees who are being recognized for their lifetime artistic achievements. The five newest recipients are director and choreographer Debbie Allen, folk music icon and civil rights advocate Joan Baez, beloved actor Dick Van Dyke and violinist Midori as well as country music singer-songwriter Garth Brooks.

"The Kennedy Center Honors serves as a moment to celebrate the remarkable artists who have spent their lives elevating the cultural history of our nation and world," said Kennedy Center Chairman David M. Rubenstein in a statement Wednesday.

Since its inception in 1978, the Kennedy Center Honors have celebrated musicians, musical groups and movie and TV stars. In 2019, the 42nd Kennedy Center honorees

included the music group Earth, Wind & Fire, singer Linda Ronstadt, actress Sally Field, conductor Michael Tilson Thomas and "Sesame Street." The children's program marked the first time a TV show received the accolade.

"Each of the 43rd Kennedy Center honorees and their work continues to speak to American culture and our national fortitude," added Kennedy Center President Deborah F. Rutter. "We are thrilled to be able to fete these cultural icons in a time where the world and the nation needs the arts more than ever."

The recognition usually culminates in a glitzy Washington, D.C., ceremony that is televised. Alas, this year's festivities will be pared down.

The medallion ceremony for the honorees, which was supposed to be held in December but was postponed to May because of the COVID-19 pandemic, will proceed as a socially distant, small-capacity audience event. The center will host a number of programs between May 17-22 that will



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feature live filmed tributes and virtual moments. Stages will be set up across the Kennedy Center campus in the capital to host live performances and speaking tributes. The fetes will be condensed into a two-hour broadcast set to air June 6 on CBS.

“This past year has taught us many things including the need to be flexible and adaptable,” Rutter added. “They say necessity is the mother of all invention. The unusual circumstances inspired and opened up new ways for us to present a deeper experience, and hopefully understanding, of the art and lifetime work of our honorees.”

Here’s what the five honorees said about the recognition:

Midori



Why she’s being honored: “With an international presence for over 35 years, violinist Midori combines graceful precision and expression for performances building connections between art and the human experience,” Rubenstein said.

What she had to say: “Artists have a singular responsibility, through our work and deeds, to echo and mirror our society and serve its needs. As a new chapter of life is about to begin for all of us, I especially feel the current moment’s necessities and opportunities to explore a spring of new and preserved energies and discoveries, to play my part in seeking various avenues and forms of creativity and recovery.

“From an early age, I have been gifted with extraordinary experiences. I consider them to be my treasure and fortune that I might now draw upon. I wish to accomplish much going forward. My plans are to be making music again, in both pioneering and traditional ways, to sing out and to stir what lies within us, to describe mysteries, of the heart and of the mind. So, in the spirit of peace and connectivity through this country and the world, I am thrilled to be a recipient of one of this year’s Kennedy Center Honors, as we, together, reach toward renewed expression of the dreams and hopes that unify us all.”

MIDORI

The Washington Post

May 13, 2021

Midori's career started with a fleeting moment. It's evolved into a lasting legacy.

By Michael Andor Brodeur



Violinist Midori will be celebrated at the Kennedy Center Honors on June 6.

For an art form so reliant on long stretches of attention, so invested in the value of patience and so deeply concerned with cultivating sublime arcs of time, classical music sure is big on moments.

Take the case of Midori, the internationally celebrated violinist turned equally renowned activist and educator — and, now, Kennedy Center honoree.

I'll bet you a 1734 Guarnerius once owned by Bronislaw Huberman that you can't find an interview or profile that doesn't foreground some prominent mention of a certain landmark [1986 Tanglewood performance](#). That's when a mostly unknown 14-year-old violin prodigy sliced through not one, but two E strings during a particularly scorching passage of Leonard Bernstein's sumptuous and demanding "Serenade"



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Midori, seen backstage at Tanglewood in Massachusetts with Leonard Bernstein.

— under the composer’s baton no less. See what I mean? I just mentioned it. (And I’m happy to meet wherever is convenient for you to claim my violin, once you get it from Midori.)

In any case, there’s a reason we call them “defining” moments.

When the young “Mi Dori” (her mononym, still coming together; her sound, fully formed) reached for both of concertmaster Malcolm Lowe’s replacement violins with the unbothered ease with which I reach for my coffee, she announced to the world a balance of talents distinct from the stereotype of the child prodigy: She’d mastered not just the space between the notes but also the pressure surrounding them.

In the flurry of interviews that followed, critics seemed united in awe over two of Midori’s most striking qualities: her skill and her [chill](#).

“It’s quite something,” says acclaimed conductor Leonard Slatkin, who penned a short essay on Midori for the Honors’ program about his years working with her. “She is so respected by everybody in the field. I can’t think of anyone that I know who doesn’t have great things to say about her and how influential she has been over the years.”

I met up with Midori recently in New York City — where she has been sharing an apartment with her mother during the pandemic — after walking the streets for hours listening to her most [recent](#) recording: a stirringly beautiful account with the Festival Strings Lucerne of Beethoven’s (only!) Violin Concerto, plus his two romances

for violin and orchestra, made just after the covid shutdown.

In a wide-ranging chat at a cafe outside Union Square, Midori, now 49, smiles behind her mask while talking about her lifelong love of Bach, her equally devout fascination and rapport with contemporary composers, and how getting the call at the supermarket that she was a Kennedy Center honoree felt, more than anything, like a sign of spring.

“We’ve had this very, very dark period,” she says, careful not to sound too relieved as she fusses with the fit of her mask. “We’re not out of it yet. It’s going to take even longer for recovery, but we can’t just be happy to see the light. We have to work to make that light come true.”



Midori teaches New York City students in 2016 as part of her organization Midori & Friends, which works to increase music access and education.

What might sound like general pep-talk fodder for the averagely scheduled person is actually just pragmatic paraphrase for Midori, whose prodigious musical talent was merely the first movement in a career that has extended into music education, community outreach and arts advocacy. She founded her Japan-based nonprofit [Music Sharing](#) to bring Western classical and traditional Japanese music to young people in Japan and developing regions of Asia. She launched [Partners in Performance](#) in 2003 (in response to cuts in arts funding) to team up with community-based arts organizations to present chamber music concerts outside major urban centers. And through her Orchestra Residencies Program, Midori



Midori at 11 years old. Her mother and younger brother are also violinists.

collaborates directly with youth orchestras. (On June 1, she'll perform [Derek Bermel's](#) concertino "[Cadenzas](#)" in West Windsor, N.J., joined by the Youth Orchestra of Central Jersey.)

And before any of the others, there was her namesake flagship organization, Midori & Friends, which now partners with more than 75 New York City public schools to increase music access and education. She launched it when she was just 21.

"I didn't think twice about it," she says. "It has always been our mission, our goal, to have a variety and diversity of music. I wanted systemic change; I wanted the ability to mobilize different genres and musicians."

Midori usually lives in Philadelphia, where she is the [Dorothy Richard Starling chair in violin studies](#) at the Curtis Institute of Music — a commitment that could easily cut into any musician's ability to perform regularly. But then again, so could recording, mentoring youth orchestras, teaching students abroad and keeping a full schedule of in-person and virtual concerts. Onstage and off, she makes the most of every moment.

Born in Osaka, Japan, in 1971, Midori grew up hearing (and humming) the musical influences that remain with her today: Bach, Paganini and her mother, Setsu Goto, herself a professional violinist. (Her younger brother, Ryu Goto, is a violinist, as well.)

Midori's most consequential debut came five years before her name-making triumph at Tanglewood — when in 1981, she appeared at the Aspen Music

Festival at the invitation of acclaimed instructor Dorothy DeLay (who had heard a tape of her performing at age 8). This led to maestro Zubin Mehta inviting her to perform as a surprise 11-year-old soloist with the New York Philharmonic for its New Year's Eve concert in 1982 (where she took on the first movement of Paganini's Violin Concerto No. 1 with ease).

The year after Aspen, the family moved to New York, where Midori studied with DeLay in Juilliard's pre-college training program. She excelled, but to the [documented chagrin](#) of most in her circle, she left early. By 1987, she was playing professionally.



Midori addresses the United Nations in New York in 2016.

It was the first in a string of independent moves that seemed to work out well for the young star, as Midori's musical career has since been a landscape-altering sequence of stunning heights and historic peaks.

In 2007, she was named a [United Nations Messenger of Peace](#). In 2012, she was [elected](#) to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and granted the Crystal Award from the World Economic Forum at Davos. Midori has been awarded the Avery Fisher Prize (2001), the Kennedy Center Gold Medal in the Arts (2010), an honorary doctorate from Yale (2012) and the 2020 Brahms Prize.

She also is a voracious reader; an accomplished student (she received her master's in psychology from New York University in 2005); and an erudite writer, having penned tens of thousands of words' worth of program notes, available on her [website](#), delving into a



Midori performing for conductor Leonard Slatkin for his 60th birthday celebration at the Kennedy Center in September 2004.

vast repertoire of classical and contemporary works.

Taken in the fully unrolled context of her career, the fact that she started so young seems like its least interesting aspect. It's actually quite practical considering how much Midori has on her to-do list.

Still, despite all she does and all we've heard, despite how wholly she inhabits the music — be it a Bach partita or a searing contemporary concerto like Peter Eötvös's "[DoReMi](#)" — there remains what can only be described as a Midori mystique. Her sound, too, balances mastery with mystery; her recent recordings of those partitas and sonatas for solo violin trace Bach's lines with a touch that feels like exquisite, if singular, penmanship.

Slatkin — who holds laureate posts with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and led the National Symphony Orchestra from 1996 to 2008 — was touring Japan with the SLSO in 1983 when he, and Midori's future mentor, Isaac Stern, heard her perform.

"She was different. She had something," Slatkin says. "And that was true personality."

(Stern was inclined to agree, though with a bit more ice. He [told the New York Times](#) in 1991 that "her technical ability is so strikingly mature that she gives the impression of greater musical maturity than at this point exists.")

Slatkin recalls the intense technical precision with which Midori attacked the acrobatics of Paganini's first violin concerto while recording with him and the London Symphony Orchestra in 1987. But he remembers it less as a capture of her mastery than as a point of departure — a glimpse of a youthful perfectionism that he has seen soften in service of constant growth.

"You never got the feeling she's doing it out of the wanting to be a technically precise artist," he says. "I think musicians don't grow for technical reasons. They grow for expression, for trying to search out the meaning of the music."



"We are just the messengers," Midori says. "And we honor the music."

Over three decades, Slatkin has heard an honesty and introspection grow ever more evident in Midori's playing; an attentiveness to the music and her fellow musicians that extends far beyond the purview of her solos; and rich parallel senses of humor and compassion that channel humanity into her "extraordinary" bow arm.

Her success also played a key part, he notes, in helping encourage wider musical exchange and influence between West and East. "We talk about increasing diversity," he says. "Well, here's Midori doing it 35 years ago."

But more than anything, Slatkin admires the trajectory of Midori's growth as an artist, more outward than upward, no longer the wunderkind, mining for meaning each time she takes out her bow.

"She walks on the stage, and it's clear she loves every note she's about to play you. I've always felt that," he says. "There's also this intensity when she plays. She's so focused on what she wants to accomplish. But it's very clear it all comes out of love."

This fall, Midori will premiere a commission that seems to entwine her twin affections for classical and contemporary repertoire: "An die Unsterbliche Geliebte" is the second violin concerto from the German composer [Detlev Glanert](#) and takes as its inspiration the letters Beethoven wrote in 1812 to an unidentified "Immortal Beloved."

A new work based on an old flame feels like a fitting way to take full advantage of Midori's investment in the past, her faith in the future and her own immortal beloved.

"As Mr. Stern used to say, we're the middle person," she says. "We are just the messengers. And we honor the music."

But it is leadership — a word Midori only recently became comfortable using in reference to her work — where she is truly coming into her own. If, after all these years, she possesses any whiff of performance anxiety, it has to do only with living up to the legacy of those who showed her the way.

"To lead means to serve," she says with a kind of etched-in-marble certainty. "I think of this as an invitation to serve, even more wholeheartedly."

FEATURED ARTIST

Midori

We proudly present Violin Magazine's Featured Artist for the August issue: Midori.

August 2022

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FEATURED

Midori

40th Anniversary on Stage

*"Being a music teacher
is not only about sharing
how to play
an instrument,
but also
how to be a person."*

RELEASES

Mikhail Pochekin

Albéniz's *Asturias*, transcript for violin

ARTICLES

Philipp Broch, 1812-1864,
Notable Jewish Violinist
and Composer

By Stephen Thomson Moore

A WEB MAGAZINE BY



Photo Credit: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

Midori: 14 Important Dates in Her Life

- 1974: Given a 1/16 size violin by her mother on her 3rd birthday, she began taking her lessons from her mother, Setsu Gotō.

- **1982:** Aged 10, she and her mother moved to New York City. Midori started violin studies with Dorothy DeLay at the Pre-College Division of the *Juilliard* School and the Aspen Music Festival and School. At 11, she was invited by conductor Zubin Mehta to perform with the New York Philharmonic in the orchestra's annual New Year's Eve concert.
- **1985:** Midori went on tour with Leonard Bernstein and the European Union Youth Orchestra.
- **1986:** Her performance at the Tanglewood Music Festival with Leonard Bernstein made the front-page headlines in *The New York Times*. The first commercial recording with Midori was published.
- **1987:** Made her debut with the Berlin Philharmonic.
- **1989:** Made her *Carnegie* Hall orchestral debut on her 18th birthday, playing Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2 — she would make her recital debut four days before her 19th birthday.
- **1992:** Aged 21, she established *Midori & Friends*, a non-profit organisation in New York which brings music education programs to underserved New York City schoolchildren. The same year, she founded *MUSIC SHARING* in Japan.
- **2001:** Won the *Avery Fisher* Prize and invested the award money in the creation of *Partners in Performance* (PiP). This non-profit organisation co-presents chamber music concerts intended to stimulate interest in classical music, specifically in smaller communities in the United States outside the radius and without the financial resources of major urban centres.
- **2004:** Released her memoir, *Einfach Midori (Simply Midori)* on Henschelverlag. Began *Orchestral Residencies Program* (ORP), working with youth orchestras in the U.S. and internationally.
- **2007:** Named a United Nations Messenger of Peace.
- **2013:** The album featuring her rendition of Hindemith's Violin Concerto with NDR Sinfonieorchester and maestro Christoph Eschenbach won a *Grammy* Award. Midori made the world premiere of Péter Eötvös' Violin Concerto *DoReMi*, written for her.
- **2018:** After serving on the USC *Thornton* faculty for fourteen years, she joined the violin faculty at the *Curtis* Institute of Music in Philadelphia as *Dorothy Richard Starling* Chair in Violin Studies.
- **2020:** Over two years, Midori created various online programs for each of her non-profits and projects, as COVID-Year Support Programs, including a special commission for a new work by Derek Bermel, a series of multi-media musical introductory films, and a diverse array of *Zoom* presentations and workshops.
- **2021:** Recognised for her lifetime of contributions to American culture in the *Kennedy* Center Honors. Midori made the world premiere of Detlev Glanert's Violin Concerto No. 2 *To the Immortal Beloved*, written for her.

Content Featuring Midori

- **Interview (August 3):** ["Being a Music Teacher Is Not Only About Sharing How to Play an Instrument, but Also How to Be a Person"](#)
- **Story (August 24):** [Midori on Her 40th Anniversary on Stage](#)

Links

- **Website:** midori-violin.com
- **Spotify:** [Midori](#)
- **Facebook:** [@GoToMidori](#)

MIDORI

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OCTOBER 2020 VOL.131 NO.1566 thestrاد.com

MIDORI

THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN VIOLINIST ON PERFORMING CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, RECORDING BEETHOVEN AND DEDICATING HERSELF TO SOCIAL CAUSES



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ACTIVE LISTENER

'Contemplate the beauties of nature and reconcile your spirit to the inevitable.' Apparently wise advice for our times, the words come instead from the letters that the less level-headed Beethoven scrawled to his 'Immortal Beloved' over two July days in 1812.

These impassioned letters to an unnamed woman are the starting point for *An die unsterbliche Geliebte* (2019), the second violin concerto by German composer Detlev Glanert and the latest major concerto to be written for Midori, following Peter Eötvös's vast *DoReMi* of 2012 (revised 2013). Intended as a commemoration of Beethoven's 250th birthday and commissioned long before the coronavirus pandemic, the work would have had its world premiere in Glanert's native

Hamburg in May were it not for the concert's inevitable postponement. At the time of going to press, Midori is still due to perform the concerto in Tokyo later this month.

'I've always enjoyed Detlev's works,' explains Midori over Skype from the US. 'Last summer I had the opportunity to hear one of the first performances of his new opera in Berlin. *Oceane* is based on the story of a misunderstood woman, a highly discussed topic these days. Unheard; misunderstood; it can be seen from many different perspectives. That's always an interesting thing about literature.' The opera is based on the 19th-century German writer Theodor Fontane's unfinished novella *Oceane von Parceval*, which depicts a patriarchal society's



Peter Eötvös

From getting to the core of new works to appreciating her students' motivations, Midori is on a constant search for understanding. **Toby Deller** finds out how the Japanese-American violinist communicates this passion to those around her



Midori records Beethoven's Violin Concerto with Festival Strings Lucerne in March 2020

alienation of an unconventional woman. Midori also recognises the voice of Glanert's protagonist in the ecstatically lyrical violin part of the new concerto – suggesting a thematic connection between the pieces. 'I find it interesting that Detlev has been inspired or stimulated by plots about either the unheard or the unseen woman,' she says.

Tackling a newly written piece is not a task that Midori likes to approach in a mechanical way. Instead, she looks to give the music every chance to mature before she performs it, just as she would with older repertoire. 'It's no different from learning any other piece,' she replies when I ask about her method for learning contemporary music. 'It is extremely important for me that I don't learn it in one go. Even though I might know that there's a concert at the end of the long process, I don't learn the

piece in preparation for that particular performance. I go through the process of learning the piece a few times, putting it away and then learning it again and putting it away – maybe playing it for friends privately at the end of each cycle.'



Detlev Glanert

She says her curiosity about new music, or at least 20th- and 21st-century music, was present in her very early days 'playing works by composers such as Stravinsky, Szymanowski and Bartók at ages eight, nine and ten'. Nowadays, her recital projects have become an outlet for this curiosity. 'I try to take as many opportunities as possible to perform this music. Last year I gave a series of concerts that >

'IT'S FASCINATING FOR ME TO
HEAR THE VARIETY IN MODERN
REPERTOIRE. WE HAVE SUCH
DIVERSITY – IT'S SO RICH'

came out of a request some years ago for me to put together a programme focusing on female composers or female inspirations. I thought then, "I'm going to make that my modern music project." I like doing these kinds of projects as recitals that are an immersion in modern music, so I'm not mixing genres. Sometimes I do mix them, but in these particular projects I'm not mixing Classical, Romantic or Baroque repertoire with something modern. It's fascinating for me to hear the variety in modern repertoire. We have such diversity – it's so rich.'

That programme featured as part of a year-long festival of women in music at London's Kings Place, entitled Venus Unwrapped, as well as being presented in New York and Washington DC. Performed with pianist Ieva Jokubaviciute, it included a work by Tamar Diesendruck commissioned by the Library of Congress, alongside pieces by Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, Vivian Fung, Sofia Gubaidulina and Olga Neuwirth. It was the fourth of Midori's contemporary immersion projects, all resulting from the active interest she puts into making musical discoveries, whether by hearing something by an unfamiliar composer and looking into their work or through recommendations by friends and publishers.

Although accustomed to working alongside composers as they create pieces for her, Midori is happy to remain at a remove. 'I am open to receiving an email or a call, and if the composer asks, "Can you play this? Can you play that?" I'm happy to answer. I don't want to get in their way, but if they ask me specific questions I'll respond.' She has a similar sense of responsibility when it comes to older repertoire. 'Yes, you want to be yourself, but as a player you're also the middle person, between the composer and the listener. Ultimately,

it is the composer's work, and just because you want to play it in a certain way doesn't mean that you can. Sometimes the composer says very specific things, and it's our responsibility to understand each composer's language, character and personality – compositional character, that is – and to pursue it.'

That is only part of the story, however. 'One of the things I've learnt through travelling so much, and particularly through working with the International Community Engagement Program, is that there is no such thing as the "norm" with a capital N, and there's no such thing as "truth" with a capital T. It's all subjective.' Does that mean she has met with resistance from other people in response to her interpretations? 'Yes, of course. It's just different perspectives. I think we shouldn't confuse liking something with understanding it. Just because you like something doesn't mean you've understood it; just because you've understood it doesn't mean you like it. Just because you like it doesn't mean you respect it and so forth. It's more interesting when we have different perspectives that are all from very sincere points of view – and not just because I want to be different but because this is how I see it, logically; it is my subjective, logical understanding and this is how I want to communicate it.' >

Performing a duo recital with pianist Özgür Aydın
at Suntory Hall, Tokyo, in June 2016



With children at the National Rehabilitation Centre in Laos as part of her International Community Engagement Program

'I'M INTERESTED IN SHARING MUSIC WITH THOSE WHO MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE HAVE AS MUCH OR ANY ACCESS TO THE PERFORMING ARTS'

It's an attitude she looks to adopt in her teaching too – she now holds the Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music, having previously held the Jascha Heifetz Chair at the Thornton School of Music, University of Southern California. 'Everyone's different, everyone's unique. There's no one way. That's my approach to teaching,' she explains. 'It's good that my students and I discover music together – and together we discover their individual voice. It's not for me to enforce my ideas. Ultimately, the student has to do the work: they have to find the idea, the expression, the will and the energy, and to respond to the music. Nobody outside that person can do it for them. I'm kind of a guide as we try different things – I share my ideas, which gives the student one perspective of many possibilities.'

S. SUZUKI / COURTESY MUSIC SHARING

Midori's own education has undoubtedly contributed to this broad perspective. She was already almost 20 years into her career when, with the encouragement of those around her, she enrolled as an undergraduate at New York University. She did not register with a view to studying a discipline such as musicology or music history, however, but instead fell upon psychology and gender studies as specialist subjects, having had no particular idea where her interests might lie, beyond an inkling that she might end up studying something within the arts or cultural studies. 'But now, thinking about it, I've always been fascinated about how the mind works, from when I was a little kid,' she says. 'Why did this person say this? Why did this person present something this way? I'm still fascinated. I'm always saying to my students: "If the composer wrote this, what did he want? What does she really mean?"'

She developed an interest in clinical psychology but was not convinced at that point in her life that she would want to go into professional practice. So, after completing her bachelor's degree in 2000, and faced with the prospect of depriving another student of a highly sought-after place at graduate school, Midori opted to apply for a general psychology master's degree, which she completed in 2005. 'I've always appreciated the opportunity to study and the fact that it opened my mind. It started me on my path to looking for different things. It also taught me some basic, fundamental ways of doing research, and different ways of expressing myself. To start seeing that there are different perspectives and opinions – this was a wonderful, wonderful experience. Also, studying psychology you learn to read very fast! And being a college student and a performer, you learn to organise your time really well – you also learn to switch from concentrating on one thing to concentrating on another.'

She had recommitted herself to the violin, but, she clarifies, 'The thing is, I never really stopped playing. I always played, and I worked pretty much all the time: I had 80 or 90 concerts while I was at school full-time. It wasn't that I curtailed my concerts while I was studying. And I didn't increase my concerts after I finished my studies, either. So it would be wrong to say that I decided to play more. Instead, it was a turning point in the sense that I actually took on the career as something that I would be responsible for in a much more conscious and conscientious way. But on the surface, what I was doing didn't look any different.'

By her early twenties, and several years before entering university, Midori was already devoting a substantial part of her career to education and outreach work beyond the conventional teacher–student framework. Indeed, she describes herself as an 'activist', a word not often seen in the professional biographies of prominent performers, alongside the more familiar terms of artist and educator.

'The activism part I'm committed to. I'm committed to using music to bring people together, and interested in sharing music with those who might not otherwise have as much or any access to the performing arts – not necessarily just music. I'm not trying to promote a particular style of music; I just feel that it's so important for people to come together in this world, and that in many different ways music can serve as a catalyst to bring them together.'

This impulse to embed her creativity in the context of the world around her is something she takes to instinctively. ▸



Midori recorded her new album without a conductor

MIDORI ON HER NEW BEETHOVEN ALBUM

The Violin Concerto and Romances with Festival Strings Lucerne will be released this month on Warner Classics

I don't have to say how wonderful Beethoven's Violin Concerto is! It's a beautiful piece where so much of the first movement – but also the second movement – is conversational, with the main themes being sung out by the different parts of the orchestra. It's magic. I've played it for so long that I don't quite remember my first performance, but it's always a difficult concerto. In the beginning, it seemed like endless scales and figures going up and down, and it was always such a mystery to me how these notes sounded so beautiful. They just take off and flow.

I had always wanted to record the Concerto at some point, but I didn't see the right opportunity. Then it all came together beautifully – it was just meant to be. I was supposed to go on tour to China and Asia in March with the Festival Strings Lucerne, but this didn't happen because of the pandemic. We ended up not performing in Lucerne itself either, as that concert was also cancelled, but we were able to make the recording at KKL Luzern.

On the album, the orchestra is led from the concertmaster's chair by Daniel Dodds. In the last several years, especially, the opportunities have grown for me to work without a conductor. Bach, Mozart – this type of repertoire I almost always prefer without a conductor. And, of course, I love Beethoven's chamber music: I've played some of it so many times. In a way the energy of his chamber music is like a concerto, but without a conductor. Performing the Concerto without a conductor is a wonderful feeling – that sense of togetherness and the way that everyone concentrates. To feel this on stage is very special.

'Where does that come from? I think it came out of me very naturally, in a sense. I was influenced in an organic way by my family background and environment to be focused in social work, social activism, and it turned out to be within music for me because I'm a musician.'

She set up her earliest project, Midori & Friends, in 1992 as a way of introducing music to New York City children (it currently partners with more than 70 schools).

A further branch in Japan has since evolved into a separate organisation, Music Sharing, an umbrella project that also runs her International Community Engagement Program. ICEP takes place in Japan and another Asian country each year, and has covered the continent from India to Mongolia since its initial edition in Vietnam in 2006. Applicants audition and are assessed on their commitment to, if not actual experience in, community engagement. Through the programme, young musicians have the opportunity to form a string quartet with Midori and to make various musical presentations. As she explains, 'Their relationship to music changes – as does the way that they think about their concerts. That's a very moving thing to watch and to feel along with them. It's very powerful. Whether they go on to become members of orchestras in different parts of the world or to become teachers, I do believe that they pass on the experience of being on the programme.'

That brings us back to the question of our current uncertain future in music. 'It's certainly going to look very different, at least for the next year or two. How we travel, how we *think* about travel, what the concert scene's going to look like, the kinds of work that I can do through my organisations with my activist's heart – that's all going to change. We have to re-evaluate.' She recognises, moreover, that it is not only musical careers that are at stake. 'Music is something that can bring smiles back to people, it's something that can help people grieve, it's something that can help people be consoled, or to dream. Music is beautiful because it has no boundaries. I'm ready to deliver all that. But I really hope that we can get on the path to recovery very soon and that there won't be groups of people – it's very idealistic thinking – being left out of that recovery.' ●



WIN MIDORI'S BEETHOVEN CONCERTO RECORDING

Midori's new recording of Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Romances with Festival Strings Lucerne is out on 16 October 2020. For your chance to win one of ten copies, submit your details at bit.ly/2YdKmpL
Closing date 30 November 2020



PHOTOS FABRICE UNGLIA

MIDORI

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November 22, 2020

MIDORI: Building Connections Between Music and the Human Condition

By Iona Oltuski



Ever since her debut as an 11-year-old violin prodigy, when she was invited by Zubin Mehta to perform at the New York Philharmonic's 1982 New Year's Eve Gala, Midori has been a household name with audiences worldwide. Dropping "Goto," her surname, after her parents' divorce signaled Midori's early vision towards creating a unique brand, later adopted by other Asian top stars, like Yundi (Li) and Yuja (Wang). Midori counterbalanced her public visibility and international performance career with her activism in support of humanitarian and educational goals. What stood out for me, when talking to Midori over Zoom while she was in Turkey, was her adventurous spirit and openness to change.

"It was literally the last thing I did before the lockdown," says Midori about her all-Beethoven recording released this October on the Warner label. The recording includes *Violin Concerto*, op. 61 in D Major and his two *Romances* for violin and orchestra, op. 40 in G Major and op. 50 in F Major.

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Recorded in early March, the album had been slated as a live concert recording launching a planned international tour in celebration of the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. Midori had teamed up for the first time with the Switzerland-based chamber orchestra Festival Strings Lucerne and its artistic director, the Australian-born Swiss violinist Daniel Dodds. Due to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lucerne concert and following tour were cancelled on short notice, except for its first leg, a concert performance in the UK, which still took place. Given that rehearsals in Lucerne were already in full progress, the Swiss government gave its permission for a local studio recording in lieu of the originally planned live recording.

The result is a lyrical rendition of Beethoven's only concerto written for the violin.

At times, especially in the opening section, one misses some of the dramatic energy often presented in the work. Its forward-driven direction is slightly diminished in favor of a more extenuated, delicate approach. Midori still sparkles, true to herself, in finely



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calibrated passages and a minutely detailed account. More variety and intricate interlacing of instrumental sections become apparent in the concerto's second movement and its dance-like variations, leading into the glorious finale. Here, one can follow her own description more clearly when she says: "I get lost in the music of Beethoven—forget time. He takes me out of the realm of my world, and I can't even remember a time I did not know these works intimately, except for the G Major *Romance*, which I learned a little later," she says. Remarkably—given her international performance career spanning more than 35 years during which she has clearly lived with Beethoven's pieces—the recording constitutes Midori's first ever soundtrack fully devoted to the composer.

"To record a work, even if it is in your hands, poses different practical aspects. It does not always come together easily in respect to timing, and usually needs to be planned out well in advance," she explains. "And then your repertoire also keeps evolving, performed with different partners at different times; we always keep discovering new things. That's what makes it so engaging."

She is thankful that it worked out this time. "We worked very collaboratively with the orchestra, it felt more like playing chamber music together, where one reacts intensely to the other, listening to each other through the context of these beautiful pieces," she says.

Whether addressing her recent recording experience or discussing her long-established and continuously growing advocacy and educational projects, Midori has an energetic and refreshingly openminded approach. One recurring aspect of her discourse, which confirms her true leadership, is her evident realization that she cannot do it all alone.

When she founded her first nonprofit, [Midori & Friends](#), in 1992, unlike today there were limited numbers of advocacy programs in New York City, and her activism has impacted the transformation of how the arts are

integrated into local schools. "There was no 'blueprint' in existence," she says, referring to the generally accepted guidelines designed by the Department of Education and Culture for teaching music. "Now," she explains, "things have improved tremendously, but it was different when we started, and efforts are still needed."

"I am so happy to see how much things have changed since I started with a true grassroots approach," she says. "Today there are many wonderful organizations dedicated to the arts and motivated to make things better. Because of that, we are a richer community. I believe the key today is about creating meaningful collaborations instead of creating more and more new organizations: the standards change, our awareness changes, we constantly evolve. And it's important we keep reevaluating our achievements and realize how our current situation will translate into the future."



Geared to provide music education for students in Pre-K through Grade 12 at schools that have little or no access to the arts, Midori & Friends serves over 70 schools in the city, offering instrumental instruction, performance, and workshops, as well as programs for young children not yet ready for formal instruction, expanding minds with musical interaction in song and games.

Instead of compiling different projects under her initial organization, Midori realized early on that to stay true to each of the diverse missions she wanted to pursue, each initiative had to stay its

own entity, each equally important to her.

Midori's organization [MUSIC SHARING](#) began as the Tokyo branch of Midori & Friends and was certified as an independent organization in 2002. Focused on Western and Japanese music traditions alike, its ambition is to foster global connectivity by building relationships that transcend kids' own culture. Working with the United Nations, charitable groups, and government agencies, MUSIC SHARING has taken Midori and selected young musicians for workshops and performances beyond Japan to Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Laos, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and India.

With [Partners in Performance](#) (PIP), Midori aims to stimulate interest explicitly in classical music, co-presenting chamber music concerts throughout the US, especially in areas outside major culture centers. Midori and pianist Jonathan Biss perform with musicians from PIP's young artist program with the aim of attracting audiences and donors to stimulate performance presentation. While PIP focuses on chamber music, [Orchestra Residencies Program](#) (ORP) was designed by Midori as a means of supporting the American youth orchestra and establishing its presence within the communal context.

In contrast to Midori & Friends, both PIP and ORP focus on classical music and forging opportunities for young musicians, built in line with Midori's own approach to teaching classical repertoire and mentorship.

Midori holds the post of Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music and

operates a teaching studio in Philadelphia. During the pandemic, Midori has begun charting the terrain of online instruction, previously unknown to her. "I had to find out that I am technically not as well equipped as I thought. I am usually very hands-on in my instruction, which makes it a bit difficult for me to be removed. ... We are all still trying to figure out the technical limitations, time delayed sound transmission, and, for example, not being able to see the whole body when close enough to the camera to get a better sound projection. With most of my students returning home to Asia, it becomes hard to accommodate the different time zone." Despite the challenges, Midori finds meaningful context in her online teaching, as she does with every aspect of her musical pursuits. She says, "I am able, even when travelling for performances in Europe, to keep up with continued lessons, which I feel is especially important."

Midori's personal goals vary for her teaching, the many projects she engages in, and organizations she has founded, but she approaches all of her endeavors with enormous passion and enthusiasm. Her extraordinary devotion to community engagement has been awarded twice, first in 2007 when she was named a [United Nations Messenger of Peace](#), and again in 2012 when she was presented the prestigious Crystal Award by the [World Economic Forum](#) in Davos.

"I strongly believe that music can provide the context that can bring people together and make important things happen," says Midori, and her record and recognition clearly illustrate her belief in this vision.

MIDORI

Orlando Sentinel

December 2, 2020

Florida Symphony Youth Orchestras get a boost from violinist Midori

By Matthew J. Palm



Midori isn't familiar with National Violin Day — which very well could be an occasion invented by one of those “Every day's a holiday” websites. But the world-class violinist doesn't need the Dec. 13 observance to remind her of how important the instrument is in her life.

“I think if I picked up another instrument, it would be strange,” says Japanese-born Midori, who made her debut with the New York Philharmonic in 1982 — at age 11.

As a child, her mother — also a violinist — introduced her to other activities, even other instruments.

“She had ideas I would do something else, like the piano maybe,” Midori says. “But I kept going back to violin.”

Midori, appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace in 2007, is serving this fall as virtual artist-in-residence with Orlando-based Florida Symphony Youth Orchestras. In that role, she's leading five online sessions with musicians of the FSYO's four classical orchestras and others.

“We are honored to have been selected by renowned violinist and educator

Midori for a virtual orchestra residency program,” wrote FSYO music director Hanrich Claassen in an email. “As we all navigate the ‘new normal’ of virtual offerings aplenty, this will be an absolute highlight for our students, parents and community members!”

Among Midori's many awards are the Avery Fisher Prize, the Kennedy Center Gold Medal in the Arts and the Crystal Award by the World Economic Forum for her dedication to community-engagement work.

Midori, who moved to New York with her mother in 1982, has worked with youth orchestras for more than a decade — but always in person.

The coronavirus pandemic pushed the program online, but also opened up the opportunity for more organizations than usual to participate.

Speaking from Istanbul, where she's playing a concert, Midori says she's pleased to give young musicians “extra support because of the difficult time we're living in.”

But “it's very different. In the regular residencies, we make music together. It culminates in a performance.”

In this online version, the different sessions reach beyond students to include teachers and parents.

For adults, Midori talks about music “beyond high school and possible ways to encourage young people to keep music in their lives.” She talks to parents about “how to actually help your kids practice well.”

She's impressed with the youth-music organizations she has worked with so far this year.



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“They have done an amazing job, keeping students motivated, finding opportunities, keeping them excited,” she says.

The FSYO, in its 64th concert season, serves more than 300 students.

It’s important for individual organizations to figure out what works with their pupils, she says.

“I’ve learned a lot,” says Midori, who was elected to the American Academy of

Arts and Sciences in 2012. “It has been very interesting. Not everything works for everyone.”

If students are finding it difficult to make music in these times, Midori is being challenged as well.

“Obviously playing in an empty hall for streaming is very different,” she says. Even the music sounds different. “The sound doesn’t change [like usual] when the audience comes in; they are online.”

But she knows it’s important to continue to produce music — especially for young people.

“It is so clear that music has the capacity to bring people together,” she says. “That potential, that possibility, that opportunity to listen to each other: These are the fundamentals of communication for any topic in life.”

MIDORI



THE SCOTSMAN

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

October 15, 2020

Virtuoso violinist Midori teams up with the RSNO for Glanert world premiere

As the RSNO's digital season gets under way, American-Japanese violin star Midori talks to Ken Walton about performing a new piece written specially for her by the German composer Detlev Glanert
By Ken Waltont

Open the programme booklet of violinist Midori's new recording of Beethoven's Violin Concerto and the first image you see is ominously prophetic: it's a long-distance photo of the Festival Strings Lucerne on stage during the recording session, surrounded by ranks of empty audience seats.

The date was 1 March 2020. "We were due to go to Asia on tour, but that was immediately cancelled when the Covid-19 restrictions hit," recalls the 48-year-old American-Japanese virtuoso. "We got permission to do the recording, which wouldn't have happened if the tour had gone ahead, and managed a single live performance in the UK, but that was to be my last solo appearance for a long while. I flew back home to my mother's in New York." At that point the musical world as we know it stopped.

Fast forward seven months, and Midori has just been abroad for the first time since to perform socially distanced concerts on Palermo, the Beethoven CD has just been released, and she is in Glasgow, recording the same concerto with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and its music director Thomas Søndergård for a streamed broadcast as part of the orchestra's ten-concert Covid-friendly digital season.

Midori's involvement is symbolic, given her expected presence as artist in residence for the RSNO's originally

published 2020-21 season, and the fact she will still be playing, over two programmes, the intended works - the Beethoven concerto and Detlev Glanert's Violin Concerto No 2, written especially for her and co-commissioned by the RSNO.

There's a conscious correspondence between both concertos. "I asked Glanert to make a connection, as I wanted the possibility of including both in the same programme, but didn't specify what that should be," Midori explains. The result was a concerto that not only replicates Beethoven's scoring, but takes as its creative inspiration Beethoven's famously effusive, unsent love letter to the mysterious "Immortal Beloved".

The result, she says, is a work "that is incredibly beautiful, very lyrical, full of drama and tension building." What's more, this is now likely to be the world premiere, as the intended May unveiling in Hamburg didn't happen, and a planned Tokyo performance later this month has been postponed till 2022.

Glanert, she believes, is "a wonderful composer."

"I was privileged to attend the premiere of his latest opera *Oceane* last summer in Berlin. I absolutely loved it." Scots conductor Donald Runnicles, who directed its premiere, describes the 60-year-old composer's score as "big,



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grandiose and gripping.” Midori detects a “definite relationship” between the violin concerto and the opera - “like his character, they are easy-going but also very serious”.

RSNO subscribers can view the Glanert online from 15 January. The Beethoven features from this coming Friday. And if that’s not soon enough, there’s always the sprightly new Lucerne recording, released on Warner and already available.

It’s a fairly classy album, characterised largely by the unsuppressed presence of the vibrant Lucerne orchestra over which Midori’s concerto interpretation flows with wholesome flavour and unfussy sentiment. There’s a definite sense of “we’re all in it together,” which is hardly surprising given the absence of a conductor - leader Daniel Dodds is the principal conduit.

This Beethoven thrives on the impulse and spontaneity of the corporate vibe, and if that has its drawbacks - periodic imbalances and off-centre attacks - it also has rewarding merits, and the added bonus of the composer’s two loquacious Romances for violin and orchestra.

All of that was recorded in March. Since then, and through the “raw reality” that was New York lockdown in April and May, Midori’s single focus has been “to think of a time we’d be able to make music again together.” It might not yet be the live thrill she hungers for, but the time spent recently filming with the RSNO has been a welcome step in the right direction. “At least streaming reminds us that music still exists.”

MIDORI



February 19, 2020

Violin Masterclass with Midori at USC

By Laurie Niles



Midori with Yaxin Tan, Ayrton Pisco and Bradley Bascon.

One might be drawn to a masterclass by Midori because of her star power as a soloist who has played internationally for three decades and still performs more than 100 concerts a year.

But after seeing several of her masterclasses before, I'm more interested in what she has to say as a teacher. After all, she currently teaches at the Curtis Institute, and she taught at the University of Southern California's Thornton School for 14 years (eight of those as head of the strings department). She also teaches as a guest professor at Japan's Soai University, the New England Conservatory and the Shanghai and Beijing Conservatories, and she just finished a year-long position at Oxford University.

She's even given a masterclass on giving a masterclass!

So it was with great pleasure I attended her violin master class at USC Thornton in late January. The masterclass featured three students playing works by Beethoven, Prokofiev and Ysaÿe; and Midori provided plenty of food for thought for the standing-room-only

crowd of students, players and teachers who came to watch.

Midori first worked with violinist Yaxin Tan and pianist You Zhao, who performed Beethoven's Sonata for Piano and Violin, Op. 12 No. 1 -- a piece which features the piano at least as much as the violin, as Beethoven himself was a master pianist. So it made sense that Midori focused on the interaction between the two instruments as well as interpreting the plethora of compositional details in this piece.

First Midori noted the energetic tempo indicated by Beethoven: "At the end of the day, this is marked 'Allegro con brio.' It's not simply about the tempo, though, it's more about the feeling," Midori said. They way they played it, "it felt a little too relaxed."

"It's something to do with the way you feel the pulse, and a pulse is different from a metronomic beat," she said. While the pulse in this case may require more speed, it also has to do with character. "What is the pulse of 'Allegro con brio'?" The words indicate a fast tempo, joyful, and "with spirit."

"So very crisp, more energy in the pulse," Midori said.

Yaxin asked if the movement should be felt in two, rather than in four, but Midori said that since it is written in four, it should still be felt in four. She added that the rests are also part of that pulse.

"How do you feel the rests?" Midori said. "It's not just empty space. Do they belong to what came before, or to what



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Midori with violinist Yaxin Tan and pianist You Zhao.

comes next? You need to feel the rests, in character, in four."

Midori also advised Yaxin and You to be aware of changes that happen in the music. Sometimes a change is clear, and sometimes it is more of a gradual transition. For example, when does a crescendo start? When are musical ideas shared, and when do they pass from one instrument to the other? "It's all these little details that actually make a difference," Midori said.

She also advised Yaxin to be more percussive in her left hand, to match the clarity of the piano.

When it comes to the relationship between the two instruments, it helps to find where the parts are in alignment and where they have more of a push-pull relationship.

For example, she suggested looking for "vertical points" in the music. "Where do we feel grounded, where do we feel the pull of the beat?" Midori said.

Another thing to ask during any given phrase: "Do you want to be leading the momentum or pulling against the momentum?" Midori said. "What is going on between the instruments? The relationships change. Where do you lead, and where do you follow? It's not as black and white as melody vs. accompaniment."

Very often you need to adhere to an internal sense of the beat and your own sense of the music, because "if you only listen, you will only react," Midori said. That can put you slightly behind the beat. "You have to take care of the inner beats.

In conclusion, "Beethoven is very meticulous about all the details," Midori said. "It's important to know those

details and bring them out, rather than just letting things happen."

Next violinist Ayrton Pisco gave a very exciting performance of the third movement from Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2, Op. 63, with pianist Chuyi Liu. The piece is so busy and loud, I noted that I didn't really get sense of his tone on the violin. I also wondered to myself, is it really possible to get the solo violin tone out there, considering the wild nature of this movement?

In a word, yes: Midori focused exactly on this issue. First she asked Ayrton to imagine how the sound of his violin travels. "How do you envision your sound to project? This is what I think of as 'focusing communication.'" She asked him to choose a specific place in the recital room where he wished to project the sound. He suggested the back door, but she wanted something higher up.

Ultimately they chose the portrait, hanging high on the back wall, of a lady in a lovely pink gown -- Jeanette MacDonald, for whom the recital hall was named. Jeanette became a bit of a character in this portion of the master class, as Midori kept pointing to her to remind Ayrton to project.

But it wasn't just about projecting to that portrait, it was also about imagining the sound, and what it was doing. "Are there notes where you want the sound to come back to you?" One can imagine sending the sound straight through, or sending it around, or sending it in a way that it comes back to you.

Creating the sound, she wanted him to imagine not just bowing into the instrument, but reversing those roles, to "meet the pressure of the bow with your violin."

Following these suggestions, Ayrton was already getting much more clarity of sound across.

They worked on a passage that was particularly full of fast notes, all slurred. She said it's easy to be "missing in the middle," that is, to fail to project those notes in the middle of the slur. Part of projecting every single note is imagining how it will sound.

"It's not what you do with your hands, it's what you do with your ears," Midori said. One must have an objective ear,

she said, pointing to the portrait, as well as your ear on stage. You have to check your "objective ear" all the time, to see if you are really getting things across. For example, in passage with many fast notes, some of those notes can get lost in the commotion.

"Do you hear every single note you are playing?" Midori asked. "You need to, if you want us to. If you really try, and you still can't hear yourself, then maybe you need to play it in a way where you can hear yourself."

She was referring to a very complex passage, full of awkward string crossings and crazy fast triplets; nonetheless she had him repeat the passage for clarity of every last note, holding him to quite a high standard. In order not to get tangled up in such a passage, "know exactly what your move is going to be," she said.

By the end of their work he was really punching out the notes, and with a lot of clarity even in those very dense and note-y passages.

"Prokofiev is so clear, he evokes a very clear image, a clear scene," Midori said. "When we play, we don't have words, we only have the sounds we make. We have to imagine what it would be like if we *did* have words.

The evening ended with some solo violin: Bradley Bascon played the "Ballade" from Ysaÿe's Sonata No. 3.

Bradley was working from music on an iPad, which he gave to Midori at the beginning of his performance. The first thing she noted afterwards was that the book version of Ysaÿe's Six Sonatas for Solo Violin contains a table in front that explains the unique symbols that Ysaÿe created and used throughout. It's important to find that table, which might not necessarily be included when downloading music, and to "make sure you are following those symbols."

Midori's interaction with Bradley was so interesting, because she started by talking about vibrato and structure -- all good information. But somewhere in the

middle she simply gave him permission to be expressive, and that seemed to be the one thing he needed most.

The beginning of the "Ballade" is quite soft, marked "p," but later it gets even softer, down to "pp." So it's important to begin at a dynamic that is quiet, but allows for getting even more quiet. If you start too softly, it won't be possible.

She suggested using an arm vibrato, which uses larger arm muscles, which is helpful during the rather scary and exposed beginning of this piece.

They took one section of the music and organized it, identifying the loudest dynamic, the emotional high point, the place where it is driven emotional and the place where it takes time and pulls back.

She encouraged him to really bring out these things, to go all-in. "Don't be afraid you are going to do something too much," she said. "You have the ideas, and you are somehow kind of shy about it. Don't be, get it out!

That was a turning point; he really loosened up and played more expressively, and Midori encouraged him to go in this direction with his playing.

"Stay emotionally involved like that," she said. "When we start to worry about what could go wrong, we make it worse and do a disservice to the music. Don't wait for permission to be expressive."

She also encouraged him to imagine the sound, imagine the feeling, imagine the mood. Then use that concept to "hear ahead," to create an expectation for how you will sound.

"You are listening to what you played, but you need to hear ahead, so that the fingers follow what you are hearing," Midori said. "First you have to have a clear image of how you're going to play." In order to free up his bow arm, she asked him to "imagine that your arm and your bow are a little longer than they are." And in fact, imagine the bow is longer at both ends. This proved a very effective way to get him to use more bow!

MIDORI

the Strad

October 30, 2019

Curtis Institute appoints Midori to endowed faculty chair

The violinist takes the chair held by
Aaron Rosand until his retirement in May 2019

The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia has appointed Midori as its new Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies. The violinist succeeds Aaron Rosand, who held the post until his retirement in May 2019. Rosand, a longtime faculty member at the Curtis, died on 9 July aged 92.

Midori joined the violin and career studies faculty at the institute in 2018. In a second appointment, vocal pedagogue Danielle Orlando, newly appointed co-director of vocal studies and the Curtis Opera Theatre, will hold the Hirsig Family Chair in Vocal Studies.

‘We are pleased to recognise these outstanding artists and dedicated teachers in this way,’ said Curtis president and CEO Roberto Díaz. ‘The prestigious named chairs at Curtis honour the school’s significant legacy while demonstrating our continued commitment as leaders and innovators in training excellence in violin and vocal studies.’

Midori’s recent engagements include tours through Europe with the Munich Chamber Orchestra, and Japan with the Estonian Festival Orchestra and Paavo Järvi, and a tour of Asia with Festival Strings Lucerne in the 2019–20 season. Also in 2019–20 she undertakes a worldwide recital tour with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet and makes guest appearances with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Kammerakademie Potsdam in Berlin, Orchestra del Teatro Massimo, and NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester.



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MIDORI



January 31, 2017

Midori Is in the Zone

By Mark MacNamara

Prodigy's End: The Need to Play On

We went to see Midori the other night at a rehearsal of the Marin Symphony Orchestra, which was preparing for a series of weekend concerts. The rehearsal was focused on Benjamin Britten's Violin Concerto No. 1. And here she was, **Midori** (Goto), at 45, as superb as ever, yet always slightly enigmatic, a Piaf who, at 11, played Bach's Chaconne as an audition to get into Juilliard's precollege program; who Zubin Mehta called "one in a million;" whose legend includes the night at 14 when, in the course of about three minutes she broke two E strings while performing Leonard Bernstein's *Serenade*; Bernstein, himself, on the podium. Midori ever so naturally took the first violinist's instrument and then the second violinist's instrument all the while barely missing a note.

Midori is that former prodigy-celebrity once portrayed on *60 Minutes*; and the psychology student who wrote her master's thesis on pain, and the woman who, in 2012, won the Crystal Award from the World Economic Forum at Davos, and who spoke before the U.N. last fall. She has always been the driven artist — in 2016, she performed more than 80 concerts — as well as an academic and a bookworm. And increasingly over the last 20 years, she has also become an activist, traveling from one end of the world to the other (most recently to Nepal), sharing her

conviction in the energizing and binding power of music, particularly for children.

She cannot say where her interest in activism comes from, her family perhaps, but she is not tied to an ideology. When asked whether she thought the new president might have an effect on the arts, for better or for worse, she flashed her famous smile — at once a mask perhaps but set with genuine humility — and replied that unlike many of her colleagues, she will not offer political comments. Politics, and family, her lost pregnancy in 2014, are all strictly private matters, and so always a trailing mystery about the magician's identity.

We sat with Midori in her dressing room during a rehearsal intermission; she had come to town to perform but also to lead a series of workshops with the Marin Symphony Youth Orchestra. This is part of her highly regarded Orchestra Residencies Program.

Ecstatic Moments

She's remarkable to watch, of course: Midori of the spirits, pitching and yawning like a mariner riding the quarterdeck, or else a Queen Lear railing against the elements — and yet, at the same time, *with* the elements.

"You can't do it with just your hands," she said, referring to the need for space to perform, the space in which to bring her whole body to bear. When she plays, she grounds herself with the left side of her body, which is the classical way; the right side is the dreamer if you will. She



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Midori with a young violinist in Nepal

characteristically tucks strands of hair behind her right ear, taps occasionally with her right foot, and then her bow arm, moving furiously, particularly with Britten, occasionally dragging the bow, and you see how she could go through E strings.

From her view in that tight, very intimate place, her chin on the cloth, so close to the bridge and where the bow hair touches the string, it's there that she enters some sort of upper room. Occasionally, she looks as though her eyes are closed, but they are not — "otherwise I would get dizzy. No, I am looking down."

Actually, in those seemingly ecstatic moments, she's looking down at the music — where there is none. She actually sees the score in her mind, not always but often; she even sees the markings that she or someone else has made. Some people see colors; she does not. But what a mind's library: "Thousands and thousands of pages which, with a little memory, I can draw out."

"You could call it a zone," she went on. "It's a wonderful place, and not like anywhere else. I can only get there by playing, and it's not like I don't feel that moment. I'm in that world at that moment which I can't recreate except when I'm performing. It doesn't come while practicing ... Afterwards, I can only say I was there. I know that it exists. I go there often."

"A refuge," we suggested.

She shook her head.

"I go there because I do. No other reason."

Such is Midori's detachment. She resists the journalist's desire to concretize, to demand a "scene" or proximate cause. She rejects the desire to reach for the

metaphor to explain it all. That's too narrow a range for her, too limiting. And so what keeps her fresh? What keeps her inspired? Walking down the street keeps her fresh; the sky, a sound in the kitchen. The slightest thing keeps her inspired. It's the sum of her heightened sensitivities and remarkable toughness underneath the guise of fragility.

And so by the same token she has no favorite music, nor any dreaded music. "The pieces I won't play are those that don't fit my hand," she said. "I love music and I'm very detail oriented, but it's not just the details, I love the whole idea of making music. It's the same way I like to cook. I like the act of cooking; it's not one particular dish. It's just cooking. It's not the left hand or the legato; it's just playing."

With This, I Am

Midori's closest partner always appears to be her instrument. For almost 20 years that has been her beloved Guarneri del Gesù, the "the ex-Huberman," made in 1734. "With this, I play," she said. "With this I lean, with this I study, I teach, I travel."

So much good has come from that instrument. And not least the way it has helped her feel ever closer to music. "I hear music differently now than I did 20 years ago. Partly because my connection to music gets closer and closer to me. I don't think about it so much. Maybe I'm trusting my intuitions more, but that doesn't mean I've become less intellectual. It's just that I feel more relaxed. I feel less inhibited. When you're young you feel fearless in a certain way, and then as you get older you feel also fearless but in a different way."

She added, "You feel more accepting, less judgmental. You don't see change in terms of being negative or positive; it just is."

Someone told her once that "Music is a microcosm of one's life." It's become a kind of koan, which she draws out and considers from time to time, and although she has no definitive translation, no clear revelation, she has found that music in her life has a circular quality. "It's like something you had thought about so much and then

you went on to some other thing, and then you come back and you remember what that was and the cycle starts again.”

Just now Midori, ever resilient, and ever reluctant to see the world or anything in terms of dialectic, has come to know one truth above all. “I have to perform, I have to do it. I can’t imagine not doing it. That excitement that I feel as I walk out on stage, I just love it.”

As an aside, in a discussion about her interest in psychology, and her thesis on pain, Midori talked about the capacity to block out pain and gave the example of being assaulted by a lion and how once in “survival mode” pain may not seem to exist, because in that moment there’s no greater goal, no greater sensation than the desire to be alive.

Watching her in the bulb light of her dressing room, her face refracted in the mirrors, it occurred to us the various meanings of survival mode and feeling “alive.”

MIDORI

STRINGS

May 1, 2016

Violinist Midori on the Role of Bach in Her Life, and Teaching His Music to the Next Generation

By Laurence Vittes

Midori Gotō, whom the world knows as simply Midori, holds magna cum laude bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology from New York University and the Jascha Heifetz Chair at the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California. Together with her 1734 "ex Huberman" Guarneri del Gesù violin, Midori stars in a brilliant new recording of Bach's solo Sonatas and Partitas.

Bach has been in Midori's DNA since her mother took her to concerts as a toddler, and they listened together to LPs and radio broadcasts.

I wrote in the March 2016 issue of *Strings* that Midori's new Bach record "subtly spontaneous, quasi-improvisational style" suggested "that Bach had not meant his scores as rigid guides to sounds, speeds, and phrasings, but as departure points for highly personal music making."

I spoke to Midori in her office at USC's Thornton School, where she has a teaching studio. She was preparing for a March recital tour with pianist Özgür Aydin that would take her from London to Berlin. Her performances included two starkly diverse recitals in Vienna. On March 15: Liszt, Elgar, Schoenberg, and Richard Strauss. March 16: Xenakis, Kaija Saariaho, Schnittke, Mario Davidovsky, Stephen Hartke, and John Adams.

Why does Bach's solo violin music remain so important to you?

When one practices Bach, one learns how to produce sound, how to use and

train our ears—our ears do get very trained by practicing Bach!—how to breathe, how to improvise, how to follow—so many different things.

From Bach, we learn about the shaping of a phrase, and how to play music. And also,

of course, about big-picture violinistic skills, not just about particular Bach pieces. It is why we think of Bach as the core of our literature.

Why did you feel this was the right time to record the cycle?

I have lived with these solo works of Bach's for almost as long as I can remember: Before I actually even learned to play the violin, I listened to my mother practicing Bach.

These works are at the very top of our repertoire, and in 2012, on the 30th anniversary of my debut with the New York Philharmonic, I felt eager to take on the challenge of taking the complete set on tour for the season. The recording at the West German Radio studio in Cologne followed.

What kinds of preparations did you make for the recordings?

I did not have to make any preparations. I've been playing them for so long, even before the idea of the tour came up.

What edition did you use?

I went back and forth between the Bärenreiter urtext and the complete facsimile of Bach's own manuscript included in Ivan Galamian's International Edition. In the beginning, players didn't have an urtext. I started with a completely different edition,



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Patelton's or Peters.

The final step in any recording is the editing process. How intensive was it?

Since these were originally made for radio broadcasts, I did not embark on an intensive editing process. In any case, I generally don't engage in neurotic splicing tendencies on my recordings. I like keeping the takes as complete and undisturbed as possible.

I wrote in my review that your 'embrace of the traditional and the authentic pays an abundance of dividends.' How important is it for modern violin students to know something about early-music style?

I listened to early music by many composers from my pre-teens on, and I would say that this listening has influenced the way I hear and think about music, Baroque and beyond.

It is not possible to say exactly how and where it made the impact, but now for me it is like the air one breathes in life. It has been a natural, ongoing process through which I explore, experiment with, and experience this repertoire.

I cannot even say that this change will ever stop, and I expect to keep working and playing this music for the rest of my musical life.

Do you integrate your work on Bach into your teaching?

I have this Bach Project with my students every year in the spring. We have a syllabus, and the main assignment is that every student must play a complete Bach sonata or partita, with all the repeats, and with embellishments or ornaments of their own in those repeats.

They are required to perform their choice a minimum of three times. Some opt

for more than three, and some even opt for more than one sonata or partita—but if they do two works, they also have to play both works at least three times.

Who books the student performances?

We [university staff] make the arrangements. Students also come up with opportunities, and recently I've been collaborating with colleagues at other studios around town to find additional opportunities.

The goal is to give performance opportunities to as many students as possible. In each studio we work with, of course, the faculty makes up the rules. In mine, for example, you can't play just the D minor Chaconne—you have to play the whole D minor Partita.

What is it like working on Bach with a new crop of students every year?

I love playing and working on Bach, and working with my students on their Bach. Of all the composers, Bach has the widest range of being right in some way, so to be able to hear what my students find in his music, and how they come up with their interpretations, is incredible. Beyond that, it's wonderful to share and exchange ideas with them.

And how do students respond to today's internet-fueled torrent of stylistic and historical influences?

Times are changing. I was very much influenced by early music—early-music wind players especially. And that was considered leading edge. Now we have musicians who play only early music. We're in the midst of a continuum. We're not leaving tradition behind.

MIDORI

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

January 7, 2023

Virtuosic Flair Precedes Dramatic Alienation

By Julian Gau



Conductor Omer Meir Wellber made his Boston Symphony Orchestra debut in the subscription concerts which greeted the new year, featuring time-tested classics alongside new explorations. Yesterday afternoon Midori performed the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with virtuosic flair; the second half featured Ellen Milch-Sheriff's monodrama *The Eternal Stranger* with the poignant dramatic reading of actor Eli Danker, paired with the funeral march of Beethoven's *Eroica* and his *Leonore* Overture No. 3.

The afternoon's performance of the concerto turned out to be a great joy, bolstered by Midori's exceptional musicianship, Wellber's collaborative leadership, and the orchestra's sensitive accompaniment.

The introductory tutti revealed an orchestra full of bright energy. Throughout the first movement, Midori found a variety of expressive voices, with smooth changes in affect between lyrical, tender melodies and playful, skipping rhythms. The orchestra supported her with strong rhythmic integrity, barring a couple passages



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where it took a moment to catch up with a rubato. Midori's cadenza found both delicateness and decisive confidence, topped by graceful high harmonics. The re-entry of the orchestra afterwards sounded wonderful — an exquisite pianissimo, with the flute solo floating gently above the ensemble. The first movement finished with a fiery, spirited coda, which left the audience struggling to keep from expressing its excitement through applause. The opening woodwind choir of the *Canzonetta* set an intimate, melancholy scene, though the oboe poked out of the texture, unsettling the blend slightly. Midori's violin resonated plaintively, with the major section suggesting fond, gentle memories. The flute and clarinet solos gave especially expressive solos, and the orchestra produced some beautifully quiet moments. The orchestra transitioned to the Finale with vitality — raucous, yet not frantic. Midori matched its mood with a sprightly spiccato. Through the more folklike passages, she had a jolly, jaunty tone, seamlessly switching to more tender, dainty melodies. She played with style, flair, and almost even a sort of sass. The call-and-response figures between Midori and the orchestra seesawed with great fun, and the musicians finished the concerto together with vigorous fire.

It was a true pleasure to see Midori illuminate the hall and the new year with her violin and her glowing musical spirit. She excelled both in virtuosic passages of fast runs and double-stops, as well as caressing melodies of the utmost preciousness. Wellber and the ensemble musicians collaborated with Midori delightfully, giving her an orchestral stage upon which to stand and soar.

In the second half, *The Eternal Stranger*, a monodrama (a theatrical piece for one actor) by Israeli composer Ella Milch-Sheriff, preceded the funeral march of Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony*, and Beethoven's *Leonore Overture No. 3*. Commissioned for Beethoven's 250th anniversary, *The Eternal Stranger* depicts Beethoven as

a stranger in a Middle East-influenced soundscape, with text from the poem "The Wandering of the Eternal Refugee and the Fight Against Despair" by Israeli author Joshua Sobol. It takes as inspiration a dream Beethoven had in 1821 in which he found himself traveling to far-off lands such as Syria, India, and Jerusalem. According to Wellber's introduction, the piece considered themes "about freedom, about happiness, about human rights, about big and small choices."

The piece began with high strings, centered around a high A, with extra notes adding dissonances, and bass melodies at the bottom. Throughout, melodies featured chromatic pitches and augmented-second jumps, suggesting Middle Eastern influences. Israeli actor Eli Danker provided the theatrical narration. Beginning within the orchestra, he moved around the stage throughout the monodrama, his body flowing and even sometimes dancing according to the mood of the text and music. At one point, the orchestra echoed the narrator's text in whispers — a striking effect which unfortunately only happened in one passage. The music progressed through a series of different scenes — at once a haunting Viennese waltz, and at other times driving rhythmic grooves, with colorful percussion writing. A pressing sense of disorientation and alienation prevailed.

Danker impressively commanded the audience's attention, his speech and movement achieving great presence and drama. In addition to speaking in English, he spoke several verses in Arabic, and he also played the *darbuka*, an Egyptian drum. A few words along the way got lost, especially when the full orchestra was playing. But Danker performed with a compelling sense of pathos and narrative. A memorable verse: "But as strong as my love is, from your hatred it saves me not."

The Eternal Stranger ended on a B-flat, which sank down chromatically to the G that begins the funeral march of Beethoven's *Eroica*. Danker walked off the stage, into the audience; he spoke one more line before retreating from

the dramatic action. The funeral march proceeded with measured poise and genuine expression. The dirge-like passages progressed solemnly, while the major episode shone through the clouds. Wellber directed the orchestra with fine attention to dynamics and phrasing. The fugato passage suddenly quickened, a bit fast of a jump in tempo perhaps, but still with power and strength. Overall, the presentation of the funeral march took upon a very Romantic character: for example, the brass called out louder than expected, and the loud dynamics resounded with high intensity. Whether this would be appropriate for Beethoven is up to interpretation, but the performance certainly made a rousing impression.

The orchestra sewed together a transition to the next piece by splicing in the opening tutti G of the *Leonore* before the ending of the funeral march. Following the foreboding introduction, the orchestra found an animated pianissimo in the Allegro, with a gradual crescendo to a full C major fortissimo. Sometimes the rhythmic integrity of the offbeat passages between the strings and winds faltered; besides this, the orchestra played with confidence. The offstage trumpet solo resonated brilliantly from the back of the hall in the second balcony — clear, decisive, a herald of relief and triumph to come. The following flute solo shimmered with vivacity, although the strings covered the flute somewhat. The orchestra handled the transition to the *Presto* coda with precision, and the concert finished off in an exulting, celebratory C major.

With the second half of the concert, the BSO endeavored to extend the classical canon and the modern relevance of classical programming. To this end, the BSO chose to pair the music of Beethoven with a new Beethoven-inspired piece. The program identifies the Arabic verses in *The Eternal Stranger* as being of Syrian dialect and declares that this connects the piece to the Syrian refugee crisis. Thus the BSO meant to relate well-loved works of

Beethoven to new music and current events.

However, the link between Beethoven and *The Eternal Stranger* seemed tenuous. The piece takes inspiration from Beethoven's dream and quotes a canon that Beethoven heard in the dream and wrote down, and the text implies Beethoven as the protagonist. But without Wellber's introduction and the program note, the connection is unclear. More importantly, it seems odd to identify Beethoven as a "stranger" in society in the same vein as refugees of war and civil unrest. Beethoven was a native-born German who lived in Bonn and Vienna. The concept of Beethoven having the experience of being a stranger in the Middle East is a fantasy — in fact, it literally happened only in a dream. Though his deafness created a degree of alienation between him and society, the estranging experience of disability does not equal the experience of diaspora. These concepts of disaffection and inability to communicate are compelling, but they needn't have been tied to the figure of Beethoven.

Furthermore, the monodrama bordered on melodrama surrounded by the comparatively staid presentations of the Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. Danker's performance made a strong impression, but the drama of the theatrical presentation seemed slightly out-of-place. The funeral march and the overture followed, but they didn't respond strongly to the questions of estrangement and disorientation raised in the monodrama. And how did this all relate to the Tchaikovsky of the first half?

With all that said, the performers all showed excellent musical and dramatic expertise. Conductor Omer Meir Wellber made a commendable debut with the BSO. His attention to small details and inner voices, and his wide range of gestures, from tiny to huge, radiated through the sound of the orchestra. Sometimes his bouncing and dancing moves verged on distracting, but his motions always expressed honest musical intentions. The BSO's calculated artistic risk on the second

half of the program mostly paid off through the vibrant, moving drama of *The Eternal Stranger*. The BSO should keep exploring new directions, even if some hiccups occur along the

way. Let us continue to enjoy the imaginative new horizons of Milch-Sheriff and many other contemporary voices.

MIDORI

San Francisco Examiner

February 1, 2023

Midori, world-astonishing violinist, descends on S.F. to play Bach

By Yoshi Kato

There's an elite list of classical musicians who are also part of popular culture, and violinist Midori's 2020 Kennedy Center Honor cemented her place on it. She made her professional debut at 11 with the New York Philharmonic and three years later performed Leonard Bernstein's "Serenade" at the Tanglewood Music Festival with the composer himself conducting. By her mid-teens, she was a full-time touring classical musician, with the Washington Post noting in 2012 that she was "perhaps the most celebrated child prodigy in modern times."

Now 51, Midori has performed with the world's major classical music institutions, from the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics to the London and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, as well as with other superstars such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, pianist Emanuel Ax and conductor Zubin Mehta. The Osaka native and longtime U.S. resident answered emailed questions by voice memo en route to her home in Philadelphia, discussing her upcoming pair of recitals for San Francisco Performances in which she'll tackle two diverse programs rooted in pieces Bach wrote for violin. The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

S.F. Performances' 2022-23 season is celebrating the 40th anniversary of your famed professional debut. Do you remember it?

When I first made my debut with the New York Philharmonic, it was in 1982 on New Year's Eve. I do remember what

it was like. I was very, very excited. Back then, I had so few opportunities to perform with an orchestra and it was such a special treat. I was so happy to be able to play and to make music and to collaborate with so many other musicians. And that's what I do remember about these early concerts — especially those with an orchestra.

With these solo programs, you'll be in a setting that's the complete opposite of being a soloist with a big orchestra. What's that like as a performer?

Doing a solo recital is actually a very unique experience, a unique feeling, to be alone completely. And most of the time, there isn't even another prop, so to speak. There's not a stand, and it's at times feeling so alone.

Yet that's also the beauty of it. Because the sounds that I hear and the sounds I can create are actually, indeed, what there is. And it's so pure, and it's so concentrated. And it's also something that makes one feel so responsible. But to create the sound, and the sound then surrounds me, it's absolutely unique.

Why did you choose different Bach sonatas for solo violin and violin partitas as the basis for both programs?

When I first did a Bach project over 10 years ago, I actually didn't include the contemporary works that are now being included this time around. For a long time, I've always made a point of performing Bach. And starting at a time when I was still early in my teaching



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position at USC, I made a point of having a special Bach celebration every year with all my students.

And I used to perform in the celebrations as well, while my students played either a sonata or partita or a pair of them or a trio of them, two or three works. And I started also playing multiple ones, as well. Through that experience, every year, I lived with Bach and would put the programs together. And somehow these groupings really found their own way to becoming a program.

And then the rest of each program consists of different contemporary works. Can you discuss that choice?

The contemporary works included in this cycle, these are all pieces that have been inspired or influenced in some way by the music of Bach or the idea of Bach. There is a very sort of natural connection with Bach in these pieces.

Are you in contact with these composers, or do you choose to interpret their compositions independently?

These composers are all living, and I've had varying degrees of communication with them. It's fantastic that, through technology, we're now able to reach out so easily and that, at the very least, I was able to communicate in writing with each of them.

Given his status as a musical maverick, John Zorn's "Passagen" (scheduled for Sunday afternoon) might be the most surprising of your selections. What can you share with us about that?

John Zorn's "Passagen" is an incredible piece of music. It's something I've really enjoyed practicing and learning. I also have opportunities to correspond and meet with John. That was a treat. And as he says in his own words, it's like the retrospective of violin works within this single piece with bits of Bartok, bits of Alan Berg. There's of course, Bach and also Paganini. Yeah, it's a lot of fun.

Finally, you've become nearly as well known for your educational and nonprofit work. How does that inspire your playing?

Through the nonprofit work that I do, through the educational work that I do and the accompanying UN Messenger of Peace designation, I think that my perspectives are constantly being challenged and expanded. And in very unique ways, they all come back to the music.

I'm not actually exactly trying to achieve certain experiences in order to have them influence my music. But in the end they end up influencing the music, I think, because music is so encompassing of my person, and my person is really so influenced by all my experiences.

New York CLASSICAL REVIEW

February 10, 2023

Midori delivers solo Bach and the moderns at Zankel Hall

By David Wright



The violinist Midori stood alone onstage Thursday night at Carnegie's Zankel Hall and gave an object lesson in realizing the intricate contrapuntal thoughts of J.S. Bach on an instrument with just four strings. The sold-out audience could read her extensive essay on the subject in the printed program, and more importantly, marvel at the depth of her performances of two sonatas and a partita by the master himself, with nary an accompanist in sight.

Two very up-to-date solo works by Thierry Escaich and John Zorn were the tangy sorbets between the substantial Baroque courses. The French composer's four-minute solo *Nun komm* may have been based on a chorale tune Bach used often, "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland," but in no time it was spinning through a world of

lightning scales, slashing chords, and impassioned cries, using novel "extended" playing techniques to put a 21st-century spin on Bach's contrapuntal methods. Midori hurled herself into the daunting score with fire and enthusiasm.

Multiply that observation times three for Midori playing a longer piece by John Zorn, the saxophone-playing, always-surprising inhabitant of the borderlands between classical, jazz, rock and the avant-garde. His piece was titled *Passagen*, (Passages), as in "What's the hardest passage in that piece?" Indeed, Zorn seemed to have created a catalogue of all the seemingly impossible things violinists have been asked to do over the centuries: blindingly fast scales and string-crossing, of course, but also left-hand pizzicato, enormous smears of glissando, stratospheric harmonics, and bow tricks galore—basically, what happens when a rock sensibility gets hold of this ancient instrument. It's a stretch, but so it was also when Bach picked his violin up and wrote four-voice fugues on it.

Speaking of fugues, there are Bach instrumental works that wear their learning lightly, and others less so. In the solo violin world, his sonatas are derived in form and character from the old "church sonata," which implies a certain sobriety and intellectual rigor. On the other hand, the partitas are



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called that because they're party music. (Just kidding! But maybe somebody should look into that etymology.) At least, their allemandes, sarabandes, gigue, etc., evoke the dancing room, not the chapel.

So the partitas are lighter fare—until they're not. The Partita No. 2 in D minor, with which Midori closed Thursday's program, dances pleasantly through four standard movements, then closes with a chaconne, a slow dance in triple meter, with variations—although to describe this chaconne that way is like calling Chartres Cathedral the neighborhood church. Longer than the other four movements combined, the D minor Chaconne is one of Bach's most awe-inspiring works, a vast journey of the emotions and the spirit.

It made a worthy ultimate destination for Thursday's program. The road there began with the opening Grave (literally weighty, or serious) movement of the Sonata No. 2 in A minor, BWV 1003. Midori's playing—serious but not heavy—sought expression not in vibrato but in the shape and freedom of melodies, as she illustrated the goal in her essay “to simultaneously render different lines while retaining their underlying simplicity.”

The sonata's long fugue was the supreme test of that principle, with its high-stepping subject and running countermelodies. Thanks to the violinist's sense of tone color and pace, this complex music flowed naturally from one arrival point to the next, and the listener's ear never tired. The Andante, by contrast, was a study in expressive simplicity, an aria in scale phrases with a second voice lightly sketched in. The closing Allegro flew along in a single line, important notes gently emphasized, always on a curve and going someplace, and delicately embellished in the repeats—the perfect dessert.

Following Escaich's brief, challenging piece, Bach's Sonata No. 3 in C major, BWV 1005, stepped lightly with a dotted rhythm through a landscape of rolled chords, adagio—literally, at ease. In contrast, this sonata's fugue—a double fugue in fact, with one smooth subject,

another more angular one, and no end of running counterpoints—achieved new heights of complexity. Midori's busy bow and flashing fingers kept all those balls in the air with aplomb. A long-lined Largo and a showy Allegro that swirled like gusts of wind closed the sonata.

In the program's second half, the jaw-dropping virtuosity of the Zorn piece both tickled the ear and whetted the appetite for more substantial Bach. The Partita No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1004, opened with a shapely, flowing Allemande and a glittering Courante spiked with little runs. True to its traditional character, the Sarabande was introspective and ornate, the violinist making sure to keep the slow movement's overall structure in view. The fleet Gigue was simply a gas, pure wizardry of bow and fingers.

The immensity of the Chaconne poses challenges not only of contrapuntal playing and communicating the individual character of each of the 32 variations—challenges Midori met superbly on Thursday—but of keeping the listener engaged, through pacing and suspense, over the long span of the piece. Midori's strategy, quite effective at first, was to embark on the theme and variations modestly, in a piano-to-pianissimo dynamic, avoiding overinflection, pulling back whenever the music seemed in danger of getting too “hot.” Even a brilliant series of string-crossing variations began pianissimo before finally bursting into full sunshine.

But without some fury preceding them, the tender D major variations at mid-movement came not as balm, but as just more variations. And with the return to D minor, this listener found himself almost involuntarily counting variations (“five more to go...”), never a good sign. Closing the Chaconne with a return home to the original theme, Midori was rewarded with an ovation that justly recognized the splendor of Bach's creation and the excellence of her playing. To be truly transported by the experience would have to wait for another night.

MIDORI

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where it took a moment to catch up with a rubato. Midori's cadenza found both delicateness and decisive confidence, topped by graceful high harmonics. The re-entry of the orchestra afterwards sounded wonderful — an exquisite pianissimo, with the flute solo floating gently above the ensemble. The first movement finished with a fiery, spirited coda, which left the audience struggling to keep from expressing its excitement through applause. The opening woodwind choir of the *Canzonetta* set an intimate, melancholy scene, though the oboe poked out of the texture, unsettling the blend slightly. Midori's violin resonated plaintively, with the major section suggesting fond, gentle memories. The flute and clarinet solos gave especially expressive solos, and the orchestra produced some beautifully quiet moments. The orchestra transitioned to the Finale with vitality — raucous, yet not frantic. Midori matched its mood with a sprightly spiccato. Through the more folklike passages, she had a jolly, jaunty tone, seamlessly switching to more tender, dainty melodies. She played with style, flair, and almost even a sort of sass. The call-and-response figures between Midori and the orchestra seesawed with great fun, and the musicians finished the concerto together with vigorous fire.

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With the second half of the concert, the BSO endeavored to extend the classical canon and the modern relevance of classical programming. To this end, the BSO chose to pair the music of Beethoven with a new Beethoven-inspired piece. The program identifies the Arabic verses in *The Eternal Stranger* as being of Syrian dialect and declares that this connects the piece to the Syrian refugee crisis. Thus the BSO meant to relate well-loved works of

Beethoven to new music and current events.

However, the link between Beethoven and *The Eternal Stranger* seemed tenuous. The piece takes inspiration from Beethoven's dream and quotes a canon that Beethoven heard in the dream and wrote down, and the text implies Beethoven as the protagonist. But without Wellber's introduction and the program note, the connection is unclear. More importantly, it seems odd to identify Beethoven as a "stranger" in society in the same vein as refugees of war and civil unrest. Beethoven was a native-born German who lived in Bonn and Vienna. The concept of Beethoven having the experience of being a stranger in the Middle East is a fantasy — in fact, it literally happened only in a dream. Though his deafness created a degree of alienation between him and society, the estranging experience of disability does not equal the experience of diaspora. These concepts of disaffection and inability to communicate are compelling, but they needn't have been tied to the figure of Beethoven.

Furthermore, the monodrama bordered on melodrama surrounded by the comparatively staid presentations of the Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. Danker's performance made a strong impression, but the drama of the theatrical presentation seemed slightly out-of-place. The funeral march and the overture followed, but they didn't respond strongly to the questions of estrangement and disorientation raised in the monodrama. And how did this all relate to the Tchaikovsky of the first half?

With all that said, the performers all showed excellent musical and dramatic expertise. Conductor Omer Meir Wellber made a commendable debut with the BSO. His attention to small details and inner voices, and his wide range of gestures, from tiny to huge, radiated through the sound of the orchestra. Sometimes his bouncing and dancing moves verged on distracting, but his motions always expressed honest musical intentions. The BSO's calculated artistic risk on the second

half of the program mostly paid off through the vibrant, moving drama of *The Eternal Stranger*. The BSO should keep exploring new directions, even if some hiccups occur along the

way. Let us continue to enjoy the imaginative new horizons of Milch-Sheriff and many other contemporary voices.

MIDORI



March 5, 2024

High-energy Dvořák in Prague

By Frank Kuznik

The [Year of Czech Music](#) proceeds apace in Prague with a steady stream of guest artists offering fresh interpretations of the repertoire. PKF – Prague Philharmonia burnished an all-Dvořák program with a fine showing from a powerhouse duo, conductor [Eugene Tzigane](#) and violin virtuoso Midori.

Tzigane offered energetic readings marked by clarity and precision, but his main strength was in the dynamics. He showed an intuitive feel for the power and grace in the music that gave it a distinctive character, pulsing with drama and excitement yet never overreaching, rising to grand dimensions that melted easily into lilting melodies or soft, colorful solos. It's an expressive style held together by an impressive technical command and an underlying sense of discovery, as if each phrase and passage is a new gem waiting to be cut and polished to a glittering finish.

The overture to Dvořák's early opera *Vanda* set the template: bold, sharp and uptempo, featuring bright, clear brass, ringing horns and woodwinds, and percussion with pop. The dynamics added depth, though by the end seemed overly grandiose for a short, relatively modest piece. The boisterous approach also masked an emotional vacancy that became evident over the course of the evening. No one can imbue Czech music with the warmth that native players bring to it, but even by that standard Tzigane seemed more of a technician than an artist at times,

creating exhilarating music with a hollow emotional core.

Midori offered a welcome contrast with a riveting performance of Dvořák's *Violin Concerto in A minor*, blending brilliant technique with a wellspring of feeling. She matched the intensity of the orchestra in the opening movement and then soared above it, spinning out the intricate solos like fine golden threads. Her playing had a light, flowing quality that captured the lyricism of the second movement and the high spirits of the folk dance rhythms in the finale. Both the audience and musicians responded with uncommon enthusiasm, bringing her back out for a dazzling encore of the Preludio from Bach's *Partita no. 3 in E major* that had everyone in the hall holding their breath.

For sheer exuberance, Tzigane's treatment of Dvořák's Eighth Symphony was nonpareil, an invigorating yet exacting run through all the possibilities in the music. If the opening movement was short on soul, it was masterful in creating an expansive soundscape and spotlighting glimmering woodwinds that were the heart of the piece. Tzigane handled them expertly in the tricky calls-and-responses of the second and third movements, where he also showed a lighter touch crafting melodies with charm. And it was impossible not to be swept up in the galloping finale, which even in a frenzied finish remained clear, crisp and buoyant. If this symphony could be



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rendered in CinemaScope and Technicolor, Tzigane would be the conductor of choice.

As it was, he gave it his all, out of breath after the final swipe of his baton and needing a minute to compose himself before turning to face the audience.

While one might have wished for more of that passion in the music, overall it was a rewarding evening, with Tzigane and Midori turning in a technical *tour de force* and offering a reminder of how rich and resonant Dvořák's music can be.

MIDORI



March 18, 2022

Midori Returns to Walt Disney Concert Hall

By Henry Schilinger

On March 16, Midori performed a recital at Walt Disney Concert Hall, which included works by Mozart, Schumann, Bach, Skalkottas and Brahms. She was accompanied by the Turkish-American pianist Özgür Aydin.

Upon entering WDCH, the audience saw the screen lowered for the program of violin sonatas. Shortly after the lights went down, a message appeared on the screen—a prayer really—written by Midori about the tragedy in Ukraine. Then in tribute to the Ukrainian people, Midori and Aydin walked on stage and played “Melody,” by Ukrainian composer Myroslav Skoryk. They then exited the stage and reappeared a few minutes later to begin the recital.

The first half of the program featured the Violin Sonata No. 24 in F major, K. 376 by Mozart and the Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in D minor, Op. 121 by Schumann. These two pieces stand in stark contrast with each other: the Mozart in F major being light and airy and the Schumann in the relative D minor full of sturm und drang. The latter was, after all, written in the last years of Schumann’s deeply troubled life during which he was at perhaps his lowest point psychologically. The two sonatas, however, do have one thing in common: they are both sonatas equally for violin and piano rather than violin pieces with piano accompaniment. Maybe for this reason and because the Skalkottas and Brahms in the second half have demanding piano parts,

Midori chose to perform with Aydin who is an accomplished soloist in his own right.

The second half of the program spanned about 200 years from the Sonata in E minor, BWV 1023 by Bach written in the early 1700s to the Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108 by Brahms composed in 1888, to the Little Suite, No. 2 by the Greek composer Nikos Skalkottas composed in 1946. In addition to her playing, Midori’s programming was also spot on. Both the Bach sonata and the Little Suite by Skalkottas were relatively short, but each was packed with expansive musical ideas. The Bach was typical with little dynamic variation and a limited range of fingering; the Skalkottas showcased the full dynamic range of the violin and its fingerboard.

The pièce de résistance was the four-movement Romantic sonata by Brahms with its soaring melodies and complicated structure. The piece is demanding for both instruments and thus requires top-notch performers. With Midori and Aydin, the audience was richly rewarded with an intensely romantic rendition of this masterpiece. Midori displayed amazing control of the dynamics of each piece. Her pianissimos were barely a whisper, and she had an unbelievable control of the bow such that one never actually saw the bow stop at the end of a quiet phrase.

In all the pieces on this program, Midori’s playing was perfectly fit for each work. She is really like a musical



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chameleon, becoming the classical Mozart, the Romantic Schumann and Brahms, the baroque Bach and the contemporary Skalkottas. Appearing in an understated long black gown, which almost blended in with the black of the piano, Midori does not make the performance about her; she is not flashy. In fact, one doesn't watch her as much as one watches how she plays the violin. She is just a conduit for great music. She appears to view her playing as a gift to the audience but not in a conceited way. Her gift of music is consistent with her lifestyle of giving back to the community not only musically but in other charitable ways.

Moreover, she never dominated the music, and when she could have made it all about her—she was, after all, the marquee draw—she was always an equal partner with Aydin. And they played with flawless coordination. For his part, his posture on stage was deferential, always standing just a few paces behind her during the curtain calls.

Speaking of curtain calls, the audience would not let the duo go without an encore, so Midori and Aydin returned after several curtain calls to perform an encore of Samuel Barber's "Sure on This Shining Night," putting a calming finishing touch to a magical night.

MIDORI

THE REHEARSAL STUDIO

A PLACE TO EXERCISE IDEAS BEFORE WRITING ABOUT THEM WITH GREATER DISCIPLINE.

March 20, 2022

Midori's Latest Round of New Perspectives

By Stephen Smoliar

Violinist Midori seems to enjoy visiting San Francisco. Unless I am mistaken, over the course of my living in this city, she has prepared recitals for San Francisco Performances, the Great Performers Series of the San Francisco Symphony, and Chamber Music San Francisco (CMSF). Her programs all tend to take an exploratory stance, whether that involves less familiar compositions or new perspectives on old chestnuts. In preparing last night's program for CMSF at Herbst Theatre, accompanied at the piano once again by Özgür Aydin, she seemed to balance journeying down both of those paths; and the results could not have been more engaging.

The least familiar offering held the penultimate place on her program. This was the second of two works for violin and piano by the Greek composer Nikos Skalkottas. written in 1946 and entitled *Petite Suite*. Skalkottas had studied with Arnold Schoenberg in Berlin between 1921 and 1933, which led to his finding his own approaches to composing music without a tonal center. By 1945 he had begun to drift away from Schoenberg's influence, but Midori's selection still captured an atonal rhetoric.

The suite itself consisted of only three movements, none of which followed the tradition of being based on dance forms. Instead, the movements distinguished themselves through different approaches to tempo. If there was a certain degree of opacity on the composer's rhetoric, my own reaction

was a hunger for further performances of the piece. Skalkottas had packed a good deal into this "little" composition; and it definitely deserved more than a here-today-gone-tomorrow treatment. Having written about recent recordings of Skalkottas' music [about a year ago](#), my response to Midori's performance was a desire to hear more of his music in concert settings.

This suite was followed by the last work on the program, which was also the most familiar: Johannes Brahms' Opus 108 (third and final) violin sonata in D minor. The contrast with Skalkottas could not have been more stimulating; and, in her partnership with Aydin, Midori established the unique techniques of expressiveness that distinguish each of the sonata's four movements. (The two earlier Brahms sonatas both had a three-movement structure.) In that framework there was an intense rhetoric of conclusion in the final Presto agitato, whose finality capped off not only the sonata but also the entire program.

The three works that preceded the Skalkottas selection could be described as "less familiar music by familiar composers." In order of appearance, the composers were Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Robert Schumann, and Johann Sebastian Bach. In the last case Midori chose a sonata for violin and keyboard, rather than any of the more familiar unaccompanied sonatas and partitas. She and Aydin performed the BWV 1023 sonata in E minor, which almost counts as a partita, since its opening Adagio



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non troppo movement is followed by an Allemande and Gigue as the remaining movements. Aydin's keyboard work served as continuo support for the violin line, and there was much that was refreshing in Midori's approach to this less familiar side of the Bach repertoire. "Refreshing" would also apply to her opening selection, Mozart's K. 376 violin sonata in F major. The piece was composed in the summer of 1781, shortly after the composer's move from Salzburg to Vienna. As might be expected, the piano part tended to receive as much attention as the violin line, if not more so. Most likely the music was composed to impress Vienna with the diversity of his talents; but it is clear that the keyboard "accompaniment" had been written for "show-off" purposes. That said, the chemistry between Midori and Aydin did much to allow the violin a bit more of the spotlight!

The Schumann selection was the Opus 121 sonata in D minor, composed in 1851. This was a time when the composer's activity was at the brink of manic, if not over that brink. One could then be justified in attributing a

churning restlessness to the Opus 121 score, as evident in the keyboard work as in the solo violin part.

There are those that suggest that this was the time of the first signs of mental breakdown. However, there is a solid coherence to Opus 121 that should not be eroded by thoughts of the dark times soon to come in Schumann's life. Both Midori and Aydin were firmly focused on the music itself, allowing those of us on audience side to savor the imaginative inventiveness of Schumann's score.

Midori's encore selection turned to a song composed by Samuel Barber. She played the vocal line from "Sure on this shining night," the third of the songs in his Opus 13 collection. This used to be one of the composer's best-known songs, and I was reminded of how long it had been since I had listened to this exquisite setting of the words of James Agee. According to my archives, my last encounter with the vocal setting was a performance by Thomas Hampson in February of 2013. Over almost a decade of absence, even a violin arrangement brought back no end of pleasant memories.

MIDORI

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

October 22, 2021

Emotions, and Midori, dominate at Symphony Hall

By Jon Ross



On Thursday at Symphony Hall, under the baton of guest conductor Juanjo Meja, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra opened with James Lee III's "Sukkot Through Orion's Nebula" from 2011. After a blaring fanfare — commemoration, Lee notes in the program, of the beginning of the Hebrew Feast of the Tabernacles — the music shifts. This is no longer terra firma; it's

the final frontier: The brass section leads an exploration into unknown, mystical space, extending the festival to the stars.

Under Meja's direction, deliberate but careful to bring out the emotional content of the work, the ASO handled the tricky technical requirements of "Sukkot" quite well, if at times the brass overpowered the strings. In the piece, a



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short, tight snare roll and pounding bass drum herald a disassociated, fragmentary brass fanfare. It all feels celebratory and familiar, like a grand party is about to begin, but then sawing dissonances take over in the strings and the uneven festival ground gives way.

I appreciate the ASO's dedication to frequently presenting thought-provoking new music either as an opener or sandwiched between more familiar works. These pieces are not always enthusiastically received, but new music is a definite ASO calling card for music director Robert Spano. Even when the music is at first confusing, performing new music is commendable and has, over the years, attuned the ears of Atlanta listeners to more contemporary sounds.

After the ASO's celebrated performance of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 last week under music director designate Nathalie Stutzmann, violin powerhouse Midori brought a flashier, more biting version of the composer to Symphony Hall. Tchaikovsky's violin concerto was last performed on the ASO stage by James Ehnes; before that, [Nikolaj Znaider](#) played the work in 2018. Even with these frequent performances, I have never heard as nuanced and dynamically thrilling a performance of the concerto from the Symphony Hall stage. Midori's playing combines an assured technique with a rich sonority that seems like it would be impossible to maintain even at the uppermost limits of the violin's register. In a supporting role, the ASO seemed to be following Midori, trying to capture the confidence and, at times, controlled ferocity coming from her instrument. In a showcase role, as one of the stars slated to perform this season, Midori met and surpassed expectations.

It's important to note that there is a phenomenon still very present in Symphony Hall, at least for this listener. For 18 months (or thereabouts), live music did not exist. For something that is so much a part of life in Atlanta, that's a devastating sentence to write. Now that music has returned, I see myself approaching each concert with unabashed delight, which doesn't mean hearing live music with a critical ear is no longer important. I know this feeling will dissipate over time, but I hope we can all find a way to make this joy last. I was reticent about attending concerts again with everything that's going on in the world, but my experiences at Symphony Hall have all felt completely safe. But more importantly, these visits have felt vital and necessary.

To close Thursday's performance, Meja brought out Schumann's Symphony No. 4, a work meant to be played without pause, each movement flowing into the next. This was a radical idea when Schumann composed the work in the early 1840s — the ASO performed the common revised version, which the composer completed himself, from 1851. This symphony served as a callback to the searching ideas and themes in Lee's composition, though the Schumann starts not with a bang, but with slow, interlocking lines that create a foreboding theme in D minor. The sinewy chromaticisms brim with emotion, and the ASO captured this heart-on-the-page writing.

The emotion, and exuberance, of performance is certainly present at Symphony Hall. As vaccine acceptance continues and delta variant infections wane, I hope more listeners can be struck by the sheer joy of hearing in-person ASO performances once again.

MIDORI

The Philadelphia Inquirer

May 29, 2021

After Kennedy Center honor, an intense, nuanced Philadelphia recital by violinist Midori

Midori and pianist Ieva Jokubaviciute formed a single, highly charismatic vision.

By Peter Dobrin



Classical music may be finally reaching beyond its traditional listenership, but it was decades ago that violinist Midori homed in on “trying to access those populations that might have a difficult time accessing us,” as she put it when [she was appointed](#) to the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music four years ago.

It was no doubt this sustained belief in the artist as someone with a responsibility to underserved listeners — as a humanitarian — that recently helped bring the Philadelphia-based Midori a 2021 [Kennedy Center Honor](#) along with Joan Baez, Garth Brooks, Debbie Allen, and Dick Van Dyke.

But who is Midori the musician these days? She came into public consciousness as a *wunderkind*. If her Friday evening Philadelphia recital is any

gauge, it’s clear now that, at age 49, she is in her artistic prime. This last concert of the [Philadelphia Chamber Music Society](#)’s season was on paper a traditional one: Dvorak, Debussy, Brahms. In execution, though, it put a magnifying glass on Midori and pianist Ieva Jokubaviciute as two highly charismatic personalities operating with a single vision.

The recital at the American Philosophical Society, near Independence Hall, capped a pandemic-era PCMS season that could be experienced live or online (some of the society’s concerts next season will continue to be streamed). Friday I chose live and in person with about 40 others, with perhaps a couple of thousand listening live and later from around the globe.



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Revisiting the concert online the next morning, it wasn't nearly as satisfying. Part of the difference is the pleasure of being in the room when the reduced population of bodies does wonderful things for the acoustic. The piano in residence there, a Hamburg Steinway previously in use at Carnegie Hall, has a floating quality that opens up in the emptier space. Jokubaviciute, with her great sense of fluidity, made the most of it.

The you-just-had-to-be-there aspect of this concert also had to do with the violinist herself. Midori has an intensity to her playing that doesn't shout but that draws you in and reveals itself in layers. She has a way of bringing you around to her way of hearing things.

It happens even when she defies your conception of how a piece goes. My own hardwired view of the Brahms sonatas for violin and piano was formed by Anne-Sophie Mutter's [recordings](#) with pianist Lambert Orkis in which the violinist takes a lot of liberties. Midori's approach is not that. In the *Sonata in D Minor, Opus 108*, she carefully managed

the drama. There was no exaggeration. But there was a kind of rolling fervor, and when she introduced emotion, it really meant something. The arc seemed to build over four movements, reaching an apex in the last one. It was, as the movement's marking suggests, truly agitated.

Midori has an incredible sound, to be sure. But which one? In Debussy's *Violin Sonata* there were a dozen colors, and the *portamenti* (slides from one note to the next) were carefully calculated. Violinist and pianist tapped into a depth of emotion in more than a couple of spots.

I admit to not particularly looking forward to the Dvorak. His *Sonatina in G Major* often strikes me as a little bland. But the two players found so much to love between the notes that it seemed like a different piece. Midori treated each phrase with a high level of detail — a dry sound here, a saturated sound there — yet she retained the overall sweep. The way she introduced just a hint of hesitation into the springy rhythm of the last movement was beautifully nuanced and sophisticated.

More than once during the evening, though, I found myself captivated by the simplest musical building block: this violinist holding a single note for a few seconds. Sound was as a living thing, and in these moments Midori the musician and Midori the humanitarian seemed to fuse.

MIDORI



January 18, 2021

Midori's magic cast a spell with the Houston Symphony

The violinist offered a stunning take on Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D Major

By Chris Gray

The timing couldn't have been better for the Houston Symphony (and its audiences), which this past weekend witnessed Midori just days after the international superstar violinist was named a 2021 Kennedy Center honoree. The other names receiving the award this year — native Houstonian Debbie Allen, Joan Baez, Garth Brooks, and Dick Van Dyke — provide a hint of Midori's cultural stature. Now 49, she made her professional debut with Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic at age 11 and steadily advanced through the ranks of the planet's most lauded and recognizable violinists. (Through her Midori & Friends foundation and other humanitarian endeavors, she has also made incalculable contributions to the field of music education.)

In Houston, her latest appearance amounted to a dream match-up of performer and repertoire, Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D Major. Completed in 1806, around the time of his Fourth Symphony, his only violin concerto is a work of exceedingly rare beauty and warmth. Midori's interpretation, in a word, was simply magical.

Introduced by a five-note tympani motif that recurs throughout the opening

movement, almost like a knock, the concerto began with a long, flowing passage that radiated serenity and goodwill. This is peak Beethoven, the maestro at his most blissful and benevolent. Under the direction of Miguel Harth-Bedoya, music director laureate of the Fort Worth Symphony, the orchestra cradled the melody as it built up to a resplendent crescendo.

Upon entering, Midori swirled that melody to the upper reaches of her violin's register, her body tracing the music's contours with a gymnast's control. At times she seemed to grow taller the longer she held onto a note. Her interplay with Harth-Bedoya and the orchestra was so fluid Midori often seemed to be leading them through a maze, outcroppings of cello and winds providing the boundaries.

Her athletic performance was matched by an equally robust expressiveness; her tone remained luminous even during the most difficult parts. In the movement's final moments, the orchestra all but dropped out as Midori broke down Beethoven's original theme to almost a molecular level in a flurry of double stops (playing two strings at once) and slashing strokes.



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When it was all over, she had worked over her violin so hard she had to retune before beginning the second movement. Unhurried and serene, the middle of the concerto shone the spotlight squarely on Midori's melodic gifts, often with minimal accompaniment. Cushioned by the winds' fireside-warm harmonies or feathery pizzicato, her delicate and yearning solos created several stirring moments when the world just seems to fall away.

The final movement, a spirited rondo, began with Midori unspooling a merry tune that the orchestra quickly scaled up into one of those quintessentially Beethoven moments of thunderous joy. Back and forth it went until an extended cadenza that created a slippery river of notes feeding into an astonishing finish — one last melody from Midori, and a final pair of emphatic chords by the orchestra. No encore was needed; the audience was already speechless.

The concert opened with two shorter pieces by composers with distinct Texas ties. Written in 2019, the brief "Lightspeed (Fanfare for Orchestra)," by Arlington native Kevin Day, was brimming with cinematic optimism and booming percussion, closing with a memorable melody that evoked the horizon at sunrise.

Next, from onetime Houston Symphony composer-in-residence Gabriela Lena Frank (2014-17) came "Elegia Andina," an evocative exploration of her multicultural heritage that moved from moments of turbulence and dissonance to an ethereal flute duet between Matthew Roitstein and Kathryn Ladner. The evening may have been all about Midori, but these compelling and challenging contemporary pieces certainly made a nice bonus.

MIDORI

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MAGAZINE

November 26, 2020

Beethoven: Violin Concerto; Romances

Midori (violin); Festival Strings, Lucerne (Warner Classics)

By Bayan Northcott



Beethoven only completed his Violin Concerto in a rush on the eve of its first performance in 1806 – the disorder of the manuscript has to be seen to be believed. Not surprisingly, what must have been a virtually sight-read premiere was coolly received and the concerto took several decades to enter the repertoire. Yet those early listeners may have been puzzled by another characteristic: whatever the passing shadow in the first movement development or the playfulness of the finale, the work is almost uniquely free of Beethoven's trademark dynamism and stress – as though composed against a luminous background of deep, settled serenity – most poetically conveyed in the gentle variation-

form slow movement in which time can almost seem to stand still.

This latest recording was made in early March under the ominous threat of COVID-19, but nothing seems to disturb the silvery poise and subtle expressiveness Midori draws from her 1734 Guarnerius violin – once owned by the great Bronisław Huberman. The Festival Strings Lucerne – which, despite its title includes the full complement of winds and timpani – respond with precision and warmth under the direction of their leader Daniel Dodds, while Beethoven's two delectable Romances, Opp. 40 and 50, are delivered with equal elegance and intimacy in a well-balanced recorded acoustic.

Listeners will have their own favourite recording of the concerto from the many dozens of contrasting great performances released over the last century, but this one is highly recommendable.



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MIDORI



November 27, 2020

Classical CD Reviews: A Banquet of Beethoven from Daniel Lozakovich, Midori

By Jonathan Blumhofer



There is, on the other hand, much going for Midori's new recording of the Violin Concerto with the Festival Strings Lucerne (FSL). Her timings aren't that far off from Lozakovich's – they're within about a minute (quicker) of his. But, given Midori's stylish shaping of the line, close attention to phrase structure, and better rapport with the orchestra, it's like listening to a completely different piece.

The big first movement sings from the get-go, its orchestral introduction leanly textured and always demonstrating a strong sense of momentum. Midori's solos are crafted with beguiling naturalness – floating in the upper register, brawny in the lower – rhapsodic throughout. Everything speaks: dynamic

contrasts are strongly etched, the score's lyrical lines and rhythmic gestures are beautifully matched between soloist and ensemble, and the culminating cadenza burns hot.

In the slow central movement, purposeful tempos and Midori's sweet tone carry the day. The finale is nimble as can be, brimming with rustic élan and a stirring execution of the bravura solo line. The FSL's textures, too, are terrific: the clarity of the orchestral solos and duets (the recurring horn fifths and bassoon licks, for instance) recall the classic recording of this piece with Heifetz and the Boston Symphony (conducted by Charles Munch).

Taken together, this Beethoven Violin Concerto is a romp: completely unpretentious, natural, and exciting.

The album is filled out with the two *Romances* for violin and orchestra, both dispatched with an appealing blend of lyricism and playfulness.



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MIDORI

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

February 14, 2020

Midori and Gonzaga Symphony Orchestra master Schumann's violin concerto

By Larry Lapidus

Kevin Hekmatpanah, music professor at Gonzaga University and director of the Gonzaga Symphony Orchestra, has scored yet another coup in bringing to Spokane one of the world's greatest musicians, the Japanese-born American violinist Midori.

Those who missed Thursday's concert at Martin Woldson Theater at the Fox, in which Midori performed the Violin Concerto in D minor by Robert Schumann, can catch her performance of the same work at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the Musikverein's main concert hall in Vienna, Austria, at which she'll be partnered with the world's greatest orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic.

It is not the external signs of her stardom that thrilled the audience at the Fox, however, but the experience of musical insight and charisma operating at the highest level. The Schumann Violin Concerto has long been regarded as the embarrassing uncle at the Thanksgiving table of the violin repertoire. Though Schumann is one of the greatest composers, he suffered in the final years of his tragically short life (1810-1856) from paranoid schizophrenia.

A product of 1853, the violin concerto was regarded at the time as indicative of the composer's mental illness and was withheld from publication for 80 years. Through the decades, it has entered the repertoire and frustrated violinists who have attempted to fit it into the mold left by Beethoven and Mendelssohn.

Midori has the wisdom not to force the work into any mold but to see it for what it is: a radical rethinking of the

European instrumental concerto in which soloist and orchestra compete and collaborate in the development of musical themes. When judged by this standard, the Schumann Concerto is a dreadful failure filled with discontinuities and inconsistencies.

As revealed in Midori's interpretation, however, the orchestra and soloist represent the divergent elements in Schumann's personality, which he named Florestan (cheerful, vigorous, outgoing) and Eusebius (quiet, inward, contemplative). The brusque, even brutal statements by the orchestra were met with responses from Midori that were intimate, fantastical and imaginative.

She showed the most amazing command of tempo, allowing her to make time appear to stand still without losing the beat. As if by magic, the work's "defects" made perfect sense, and Midori's mastery of the concerto's technical demands was so absolute one forgot it was the sound of horsehair on a string and not a heart and mind searching for beauty.

Collaborating with a soloist of this caliber in an interpretation this subtle is no easy task, but Hekmatpanah and his orchestra, comprised of students and community musicians, played their part expertly. This was all the more remarkable considering the Schumann Concerto was preceded by Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 1 in G minor, Op. 13, titled "Winter Dreams."

Seamless, organic development is no more an attribute of this symphony than it is of the Schumann Concerto, but what



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Tchaikovsky offers instead is a ceaseless wellspring of enchanting melody and an ear for instrumental color that is second to none.

The “Winter Dreams” (or “Reveries”) symphony is liberally sprinkled with opportunities to shine for every instrument in the orchestra. The mournful and *echt* Russian lament that begins the second movement is intoned by the winds before being taken up by the whole orchestra.

It would be difficult to imagine a more sensitive, affecting rendition than that delivered by oboist Katie Hadley Morgan dueted by bassoon David Taylor. The symphony ends in a blaze of Tchaikovskian glory, which meant many demands were placed on the brass. If one closed one’s eyes, the trumpets, under Kyle Jenkins, and trombones, led by Luke Kenneally, might have as well been seated in Orchestra Hall, Chicago, as on the stage of the Fox.

MIDORI

Palm Beach Daily News

January 7, 2020

Artists meld talents for all-Beethoven concert

By Márcio Bezerra

The New Year started with a special treat at the Kravis Center, compliments of the Regional Arts Concert Series.

Bringing together two major artists performing the incomparable music of Ludwig van Beethoven was indeed a cause for celebration on a cold Sunday afternoon.

The program featured violinist Midori and pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet in an all-Beethoven program that included two early sonatas and the towering Kreutzer.

They started with the "Violin Sonatas No. 2 and 3, Op. 12." Written around 1798 and dedicated to the infamous Antonio Salieri (who Beethoven apparently had in higher esteem than his other teacher, Joseph Haydn), the works show a composer already secure of his creative powers.

For sure, one can find elements that relate these sonatas to their classical precedents, such as the secondary role of the violin and the many graceful and comic gestures borrowed from opera buffa, but the thicker textures, explosive piano virtuosity and unusual harmonic progressions point to the revolutionary path the composer would take in the next decade.

Throughout the first part of the program, Midori and Thibaudet displayed their solid individual techniques and, most importantly, total artistic agreement in tackling the early Beethoven works.

The second part featured the "Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47." Composed for the African-European virtuoso George Bridgetower, it has a most curious history from the original racially-charged dedication to the fact that, after a quarrel, Beethoven scratched Bridgetower's name and dedicated it to French violinist Rudolphe Kreutzer, who never actually performed it.

Still, it is the power of the music that bring us back to this masterwork. Indeed, there is no piece in the repertoire that explores so many multiple soul states, from the most violent to the transcendental. It is not an exaggeration to say that this sonata ranks with the composer's highest achievements in the genres of string quartets and solo piano sonatas.

Midori and Thibaudet took an all-visceral approach that emphasized its romantic elements. They were not afraid to go wild in the most violent sections and played the delicate sections with a remarkable sense of intimacy. A standing ovation and four curtain calls failed to entice the artists to oblige with an encore. In fact, they had given it all and there was nothing else to be said or heard.

All in all, a great way to celebrate the New Year and, most importantly, this 250th Beethoven year.



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MIDORI

The Washington Post

November 3, 2019

Midori and Ieva Jokubaviciute demand attention with performance at Library of Congress

By Matthew Guerrieri



Music's consoling properties often are emphasized to the detriment of its other powers. (Even William Congreve's famous description of its charms soothing a savage breast was originally spoken by a character who promptly disagreed.) On Saturday, Midori and Ieva Jokubaviciute presented a violin and piano program at the Library of Congress focused instead on music demanding and quickening the attention: five works, by living composers, pushing at boundaries between pitch and noise, expectation and risk, diversion and challenge.

Vivian Fung's "Birdsong" set the tone, moving from glassy impressionism to a diabolically twittering reel and slashing accents, a hike through a minatory forest. In Olga Neuwirth's

"Quasare/Pulsare," Jokubaviciute moved in and out of the piano, key and hammer giving way to direct manipulation of the strings, while Midori offered edgy, high-contrast shards, a cosmos of scrapes, thumps and keening comets. Tamar Diesendruck's Library-commissioned "Unruly Strands," a premiere, was an extensive menagerie, a biology of musical cells evolving into dense profusion — mercurial, clipped, voluble — then pared away to skeletal lyricism, setup and payoff in tenaciously patient, almost Beethovenian proportion.

A previous Library commission, Sofia Gubaidulina's 1993 "Dancer on a Tightrope," turned conventional classical rhetoric inside out: disjointed, etude-like violin flourishes — a faltering Paganini, perhaps — pulled back to reveal ominous, anxious sounds, Jokubaviciute again inside the piano, using a glass to coax the strings into icy hums and roaring howls. Even the rousing finale, Franghiz Ali-Zadeh's Eurasian-flavored song-and-dance "Habil Sayagi," was laced with disquiet, violin rhapsodies smeared with microtonal inflection, the piano's strings, keys and even lid mined for percussive effect.

The players dug deep into often noisy textures while sustaining tonal richness. Midori's is still the singular sound familiar from her long affiliation with



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the virtuosic standards: big, focused, strongly projected, uncannily smooth and consistent bowing across a broadband spectrum of volume and color. Jokubaviciute approaches the piano with attentive precision — every note, keyed or otherwise, placed within the instrument's resonance for maximum clarity — combined with a provocative, febrile intelligence. The evening was largely free of the

classical canon's traditional comforts, sometimes producing a palpable restlessness among much of the audience. But it also, maybe, was an opportunity to consider whether our craving for comfort has changed the world for the better. Midori and Jokubaviciute instead privileged another human ability, one that might well prove more useful: finding beauty in a harsh environment.





