

## Preview

### CMA Masters of the Violin Series — Questions for Midori

by Mike Telin



Since making her debut at age eleven as a surprise guest soloist with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta in 1982, violinist Midori has become recognized as a master musician and a devoted and gifted educator. In addition to her many achievements as a performer, Midori is an active music educator for underserved communities. She runs several successful programs that have reached hundreds of thousands of children since the early 1990s, especially at New York public schools.

On Saturday, April 12 at 7:30 pm in the Cleveland Museum of Art's Gartner Auditorium, violinist Midori will be joined by pianist Özgür Aydın in a concert featuring Debussy's *Sonata in g*, Shostakovich's *Sonata, op. 134*, Beethoven's *Sonata No. 10 in G, op. 96* & Schubert's *Rondo Brilliant in b, D. 895*. The concert is part of the Museum's Masters of the Violin Performing Arts Series.

Midori graciously agreed to answer questions by e-mail and discussed her activism in underserved communities, her thoughts on teaching and her collaboration with Mr. Aydın. She began by talking about her program.

Midori: Selecting a program is always a project that is both exciting and a challenge. Of course, there are just so many wonderful pieces to choose from that any violinist is in a very fortunate position to be choosing repertoire. However, that also makes the decision much harder. Balancing different works on one program requires that the performer have a good understanding of each piece and how they can fit together in a coherent way.

I don't typically program performances with any particular "theme" in mind, but I do remain sensitive to what each piece will contribute and how they complement one another. In the case of a recital, of course the decision must be a mutual one between both performers. We generally start with selecting one work, and then continue on to balance and contrast it. By both contrasting and balancing, we consider stylistic elements as well as how they simply sound and the emotional impact.

*MT: I know that you have worked with Özgür Aydin in the past, including a 2013 recording. What are you looking for in a collaborator?*

Midori: Özgür and I have worked together for many years in a variety of capacities. He is a brilliant musician with a natural sensitivity to pieces of so many different composers and styles. A good collaborator must be a communicator, not only with me, but also with the people with whom he shares his music. I appreciate that Özgür and I bring different viewpoints to the table when we perform a piece of music, also. It inspires me to continue to work toward expanding my musical voice.

*MT: Regarding your teaching positions, why did you decide to take on the challenge of being a teacher and how has teaching changed how you approach playing?*

Midori: Teaching has had more influence on the way that I play than just about anything else. Working with students, seeing them dedicate themselves to setting and accomplishing goals, it is unbelievably inspiring. I'm fortunate to work with students who have wonderful, unique ideas and approaches to music-making. I constantly discover new things in my conversations and lessons with them. Of course, that's not to say that teaching is easy! But taking apart the different elements of what it means to be a violinist and a musician is very interesting to me, and sharing those things with students to help them to grow as performers is really a remarkable privilege.

*MT: I am extremely interested in your community engagement projects and again, congratulations on having achieved so much. In the 20th anniversary Midori & Friends report you write:*

*“Perhaps it was our naiveté at the time that allowed us to do something so enormous in scope, but we knew that there needed to be an organization behind these efforts in order to affect real, systemic change.”*

*Looking back, in what way(s) were you naïve, and do you think that perhaps being a little naïve might have been a good thing?*

Midori: Well, I think that it was naïve to think that any one person or one organization could go about changing an entire system of education policies in New York City. But if I hadn't been naïve in that way, if I had looked at the situation and decided that nothing could be done, then the organization might have never existed. I've come to realize that affecting change in even local or small ways is incredibly important. It's these changes that build on one another to become massive changes. But it was naïve to think that we could just jump right to those huge issues.

*MT: When you say “to affect real, systemic change”: what about the system was broken and how much still needs to be accomplished?*

Midori: Midori & Friends was formed to attempt to deal with the public school system in New York City, and specifically to address the needs of public students who no longer had access to music and arts education. Unfortunately, there are still many students in the New York City area who are not given access to these types of programs, to say nothing of students elsewhere in the country as well.

*MT: This is a very impressive program and I was very pleased to see that you include an amazing collection of artists who represent so many cultures and musical styles. Why is the artistic diversity important to the success of the program?*

Midori: Thank you for your kind words. Another example of naïveté would be assuming that one type of music education, one branch of music, would be a suitable "fit" for all of the students we were hoping to serve. New York City is, like many places, an incredibly diverse place, full of people of all cultures and backgrounds. To be able to connect with as many students as possible, we aim to bring artists from different cultures and backgrounds as well.

*MT: Another of your initiatives is called "Music Sharing." I'm sorry that I do not speak Japanese, so could you please tell me more about the Instrumental Instruction for the Disabled Program?*

Midori: Sure thing. The Instrumental Instruction for the Disabled Program aims to provide students in specialized schools for the mentally or physically disabled with the opportunity for self-expression and creativity through music. Professional and aspiring professional musicians work with the program to provide instruction to disabled students in a number of different orchestral instruments. The goal is to enhance those students' educational experience while offering them new ways of communicating and expressing themselves. More information about this program and the Music Sharing organization is available [online](#).

*Photo of Midori and pianist Özgür Aydın, by Angela Jimenez.*

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