

Violinist Virtuoso Midori – Champion of the Arts

By amy leigh

Midori is the stuff of legends. Her historic debut occurred in 1982 when she performed with the New York Philharmonic at the age of 11. In the 26 years since, Midori has established herself as a master violinist with timeless grace and never-ending energy.

In addition to an annual concert schedule that regularly exceeds 90 concerts worldwide, Midori is the Chair of the Strings Department at University of Southern California's (USC) Thornton School of Music; founder and participant of *Midori & Friends*, a non-profit organization in New York which brings music education programs to underprivileged children each year; teaches master classes throughout the year; participates in two residency programs, her *University Residencies Programs* (URP) and her *Orchestra Residencies Program* (ORP); founder of *Music Sharing*, based in Japan and *Partners in Performance*, based in the U.S.; along with her positions as Jascha Heigetz Chair and co-director of the *Midori Center for Community Engagement* at USC.

And, that is just the beginning. Midori's energy and enthusiasm for music is boundless. She is one of the world's top violinists and she works tirelessly to bring music to the underprivileged. A powerhouse of purpose and poise, Midori brings joy to the hearts of tens of thousands every year.

In the tradition of Maud Powell, Midori continues to forge new paths while bringing music to the masses. Midori founded the ORP in 2004-05 as a way to apply the residency concept to orchestras in smaller cities. Over the course of a week, she works with a youth orchestra that has ties to a small professional orchestra. She also performs with both orchestras at the end of the week.

Her first Orchestra Residency Program (ORP) of the 2008-09 Season will take place near Maud Powell's home town, Aurora, IL where she lived from the age of 3. Midori will be in residence a mere 25 miles north of Aurora. She is scheduled to be in-residence from October 1st-5th with the Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestra (EYSO) and the Elgin Symphony Orchestra (ESO), Elgin, IL. Her spring residency will occur in April, 2009 with Mobile Symphony and Youth Orchestras in Alabama.

Each residency is unique; Midori embraces the opportunities presented by the towns and the orchestras while working to achieve her vision of collaboration and education. During her stay in Elgin, IL, Midori will participate in a variety of activities on a daily basis. Beginning in the early morning and working until late at night, her mission is clear: she wants to promote and support the arts in any way she can.

In addition to her two concert performances with the ESO and her unique single performance with the EYSO (Midori will perform with three of the five youth orchestras), Midori is scheduled to make at least ten public appearances in five days. She will be interviewed on "Chicago Tonight", airing on Chicago's own WFMT-FM, 98.7; coaching at Larkin High School, U-46

School district – Elgin, IL; a strings festival at St. Charles North High School for string players in CUSD 303, St. Charles, IL; an appearance at Judson University; and an arts advocacy breakfast with the orchestras and local legislators to name a few of her engagements. She also will be present for an invitation only reception after her final performance.

The Elgin Symphony Orchestra and the Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestra are excited to have this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The residency is coming at a time when funding for the arts is at an all time low in Illinois. The past few years have seen large budget cuts; this residency gives the orchestras a format to showcase the transformational power of music. Music should be available to everyone and both of these orchestras work hard to be accessible to the public.

Although the two organizations are not formally affiliated, they have worked together in the past and continue to collaborate today. The ESO was founded in 1950. During the tenure of Music Director Margaret Hillis—a period of significant artistic growth—Robert Hanson was named Associate Conductor. In 1976, the Elgin Symphony Orchestra League, with the encouragement of Hillis and Elgin musical community leaders, formed the EYSO, with Hanson as its first conductor. It was Hanson who, in 1998, hired Randal Swiggum as Music Director of the EYSO. In turn, the ESO in 2005 hired Swiggum as its Education Conductor, to create and conduct its education concerts and work with its creative team to further the ESO's education programs.

Both orchestras have gained considerable recognition in recent years. The Illinois Council of Orchestras named the ESO “Orchestra of the Year” in 1988, 1999 and 2005, making it the only organization to receive this honor three times. The EYSO was named “Youth Orchestra of the Year” in 2000 and again in 2007. Both groups are poised to embark on the shared mission of community engagement, especially to Elgin's growing population of underserved school children.

Elgin's community needs to these orchestras as much as the orchestras need the support of the community. Midori's residency will give the orchestras a platform to reach out and showcase their work to the world around them. The youth orchestras alone provide over 300 musicians the opportunity to learn and grow through music. Midori choose a music community that is ready to embrace her with open arms.

There can be little doubt that this world class violinist will bring the best she has to these two orchestras. May the trail she blazes stay bright for years to come.