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Anne Akiko
Meyers

Amati Brothers'
irrevocable split

Violin Gypsy-style



PROFILE ANNE AKIKO MEYERS

Toned up and well tuned in

Anne Akiko Meyers is almost hopelessly beautiful. It's something on which most reviewers feel compelled to comment. But although they often choose to mention this in their first breath, the last word usually expresses admiration for her intelligent musicianship. It's her tone, both musical and personal, which is the most talked about area of her career.

'Barber's Violin Concerto gained... from the mellow singing tone of Anne Akiko Meyers, whose 1718 Strad revealed an upper register of unusual refinement: pure and intensely sweet,' (THE STRAD, May 1992).

Musically speaking, it's a fairly common fallacy, among those hovering tentatively on the brink of the violin world, that beautiful tone can be ensured by playing, say, a Strad with a reasonable amount of skill. But a good instrument isn't all it's cracked up to be, unless, that is, the player has the patience to develop a musical approach which complements its natural qualities. 'I would say maybe 60 or 70% has to do with the instrument, but knowing how to produce it – how to get to the core of that sound – is crucial to getting the best from that instrument,' says Meyers, who plays the 1718 Strad which once belonged to the Juilliard Quartet's Robert Mann. 'My violin definitely has very individual characteristics: particularly its E string.'

But a 'once-and-for-all' musical style is not for her. She still feels the need to experiment with different instruments. While touring in Japan last year she played a del Gesù which challenged her violinistic approach: 'It was an incredible del Gesù. After I had played it I compared it to the Strad and I couldn't believe the difference,' she said, while attempting to weigh up the differences with her cupped hands – 'it was like night and day.' In fact she considers herself a natural del Gesù player. 'If I played regularly on a del Gesù I might



have a gutsier kind of sound – a much more physical-sounding, masculine tone.’ But there’s as much good sense in Anne Akiko Meyers as there is good taste, so when asked whether she would like to swap permanently from the Stradivari to a del Gesù she smiled: ‘Right now I am quite happy with what I have. You know, it would be like taking the Picasso instead of the Renoir.’

Meyers has travelled far from her Californian roots in San Diego, where she was born in May 1970 and began her studies at the age of four, making her debut as an orchestral soloist before even reaching double figures; perhaps her cosmopolitan genes – a Japanese mother and American father – have given her a taste for adventure. She has played in Belgium, Sweden, Israel, Australia, Japan and England as well as the US where her career developed under the guidance of a number of well-known pedagogues. These include Joseph Gingold at Indiana University, Alice and Eleanor Schoenfeld at the R.D. Colburn School of Performing Arts in Los Angeles and, at the age of 14, she went to New York’s Juilliard, where she has since made her home, to study with Dorothy DeLay, Masao Kawasaki and Felix Galimir.

She appears to have benefited from their very different teaching methods. ‘Gingold was wonderful in that he could play the accompaniment to any concerto on the violin. So we



‘That she is young, attractive and personable enough to appear on “Tonight” with Johnny Carson has nothing to do with her music, but none of these are going to hurt her career.

They might if she chose to ride on them. But there were encouraging indications that Ms Meyers isn’t going to take the easy route.’ (*New York Times*, 6 November 1990)

would be playing duets all the time. He has a great response to chamber music and music making.’ The sweetness which is often commented upon in her own playing is something she detects in Gingold. ‘He’s like an old style player – the tone is very sweet. There are certain characteristics in today’s society, like, the playing is so hard from most young performers; the technique is all there but the musicality is missing. But Gingold has a real sweetness in his playing.

‘Dorothy DeLay was completely different in that she taught me to teach myself. She told me hardly anything in the lessons so I had to go out and see why I was playing a certain way and how to help myself get a better technique. The first year I was with DeLay was extremely difficult because I had been studying with Michelle Scanfeld in Los Angeles who told me everything, to DeLay who told me nothing. So that was a very frustrating year for me.’

Her career is being seasonally planned. Life revolves

around concert tours and concert tours revolve around recordings. ‘My BMG contract is for seven years. They have one or two a year planned. It’s a lot considering I like to play the repertoire frequently before recording it, so I have got to plan the seasons according to the recording part of it.’

What are her long term plans? ‘It’s kind of dangerous to make long term plans,’ she says reflectively. One wonders who is actually doing the planning. One thing is for sure, though, when it comes to perfecting musical standards Anne Akiko Meyers is wholly on top. For example, on the subject of CD recordings: ‘It’s hard to keep up the stamina and the concentration for so many hours on end. Because I might have to do takes over again not because I was out of tune but because the balance between the orchestra and myself was a little bit off which means doing the whole movement over again. The pressure is enormous. They could cut in of course, but I’m a sort of a purist in that way – I don’t like to do section by section; I like to do movement by movement. The flow of the ideas gets cut

severely if you agree to do a section again; it's just not like a live performance at all.'

In the same way as her tone, whether interpreted through a sweetly discreet Strad or a lusty del Gesù, makes for a pedigree, her rapidly developing photographic image presents two equally lovely but contrasting marketing approaches. The simple, smiling celluloid which was used in THE STRAD review of her RFH 14 November '91 performance of Barber's Violin Concerto is startlingly in contrast with the highly charged and sophisticated 'Mutter lookalike' picture used on the later cover of her debut CD of Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole* and Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* for Victor Red Seal. 'Yes, I know, I looked about 35!' she commented, sotto voce. It's clear

which image she prefers but, all the same, she maintains that she has the final say: 'A lot of people see me in a different way – some people might choose a photo and think I look stunning and I might think it looks totally disgusting. Everybody has different feelings on different photos and it's hard to control so many people.'

Hard or impossible? – her control is questionable, particularly since RCA has a penchant for glamourising its female soloist line-up (including, for example, Ofra Harnoy). It's all part of the wider marketing machine – although she hasn't yet reached Yo-Yo Ma's *Sesame Street* level, her charismatic stage presence has already led her the way of all American style publicity campaigns and found a seat, not once but twice, on the Johnny Carson show. □