



Anne Akiko Meyers

The world-renowned concert violinist on her lifelong career, balancing motherhood and the importance of music.

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It's an early spring morning, thick with an eerie fog that traces the city's rolling green hills. Anne Akiko Meyers is in her living room, looking contentedly out on Lake Austin, which, in the haze, looks like an expansive ocean with a horizon that appears, like her career, to be limitless.

The decision to become a concert violinist came early for Meyers, at age 7, to be exact. Described as a child prodigy, at age 11, she debuted with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and made her first appearance on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson. At 18, she put out her first recording and went on to release 32 studio albums (16 of which are solo) during the next 25 years. She currently plays on a 274-year-old violin valued at \$16 million, and in 2014, was Billboard's No. 1 traditional classical instrumental soloist. She's adored by audiences and has been featured on national and international television and radio, has performed at preeminent concert halls throughout the world, and collaborated with the world's most celebrated musicians, constantly evolving to take her art to the next level.

With all her accolades and accomplishments, Meyers remains her charming, witty, down-to-earth self, establishing roots in Austin with her husband and two young girls.

The esteemed violinist leads me to her cozy sunroom wearing a summery cobalt-blue dress and her signature pixie cut. Meyers has a quiet intensity about her but also laughs easily and often, offering engaging conversation. As the gray of the day melts away and the sun lights up our surroundings, she begins to recount the history of her lifelong career.



"My mother played a lot of music for me when she was pregnant," Meyers explains. "She would play the Beethoven *Violin Concerto* for me performed by David Oistrakh, who was one of the greatest Russian virtuosos of the 20th century."

Meyers' mother understood and valued the importance of music and its connection with a child's brain development, and grew up listening to classical music and playing the piano in her hometown of Tokyo, Japan.

"It was part of one's upbringing to embrace that kind of music," says Meyers, whose father, an American, contemplated pursuing a professional career in music himself, studying with teachers from the Chicago Symphony. "He wanted to be the next Benny Goodman, still plays clarinet to this day and he's 76 years old."

Meyers' parents met in Tokyo, where her father taught English, eventually relocating to Southern California. At that time, it was extremely uncommon for a Japanese woman to leave her family and her country, but if Meyers' career is any indication, her family did anything but follow the straight and narrow.

Meyers began taking violin lessons at the age of 4 in a "tiny, teeny-weeny, little town in California," and her mother was

tremendously influential in introducing the Suzuki Method—an approach to teaching music created by Japanese violinist Shinichi Suzuki that utilizes the basic principles of learning a language—to the music teachers in the area. Meyers' first teacher, Shirley Helmick, taught her to read notes instead of learning by memorization.

"I was very fortunate to read music from day one," says Meyers, who, at age 7, started driving three and a half hours each way with her mother to advance her violin studies, honing her craft and beginning to own her potential.

It was about this time that her family moved to Los Angeles and she came to realize the route her life would take.

"My mother took me to the Hollywood Bowl and she made bento boxes for me and my sister to eat—onigiri—which is like a packed rice ball," she recalls, smiling at the memory. "We were just sitting there eating rice balls," she begins to laugh, "and out comes Itzhak Perlman playing the Tchaikovsky concerto. I was so mesmerized and enthralled with the whole concert process, of being able to go out onstage and be the soloist. I was completely smitten. I decided then and there that I wanted to be a concert violinist."

Photo by Shawn Connell, Christian Oth Studio.

Meyers' parents unconditionally supported her gift by encouraging her to study under some of the greatest violin teachers in the U.S. But it wasn't easy. Meyers' schedule and expectations were demanding, and her family had to make major sacrifices along the way for her to pursue her dreams, raising doubt in the young artist.

She recalls studying with the famous Schoenfeld Sisters, who introduced her to the idea of color, how to create color through her playing, and how to emanate "the luster of a pearl" with the sound of her violin, which, she says, were difficult concepts for her to grapple with at 11 years old.

At 14, she, her mother and her sister moved to New York so she could begin taking lessons at the Juilliard Pre-College Division with the preeminent teacher Dorothy DeLay.

"Dorothy's method for me was really one that you taught yourself. She gave you the tools of the trade and encouraged you to go to the library, to study and analyze the recordings, to break it down, go to as many performances as possible, listen, listen, listen, listen," Meyers says. "But essentially, you are teaching yourself. You're trying to find your own signature, your own voice, your own sound. That was essential."

While the intensity of studying and playing at a young age created feelings of isolation for Meyers, the move to New York made life that much more difficult, as her father had to continue his work as the president of a university in Oregon, which separated the family.

"The family was split because of this music career that I wasn't even sure would lead to anything. There was a lot of doubt then. I just wasn't sure that it was meant for me," Meyers says.

But she continued to work hard, signing with professional management at age 16, and releasing her first recording at age 18 through Abbey Road Studios in London. After a few more years of studying, performing and recording, Meyers hit a wall.

"When I was about 22, I really came to a place in my life where I questioned if this was the right path for me. I took one month off, no violin, and I just traveled," she says. "I actually went to my parents and said, 'I'm not sure that I want to continue.' And I thought they would absolutely kill me, after everything that we had all put into it."

But she couldn't get away from the violin, saying she started dreaming of music.

"Spiritually, I missed music so much. I was just yearning for it in my dreams. It was haunting me. It was like I had to go back to the violin," she explains. "Something in my soul had clicked and I knew that's what I wanted to do. It was a re-affirmation, for sure."

THE LATEST FROM ANNE AKIKO MEYERS

In 2014, Meyers released not one, but two albums: *The Four Seasons: The Vivaldi Album* in February, and *The American Masters* in September.



THE FOUR SEASONS: THE VIVALDI ALBUM

The album was recorded on the Vieuxtemps Guarneri violin. Meyers was inspired by composer Antonio Vivaldi, who wrote a series of concertos that embodied the feelings evoked by spring, summer, autumn and winter, but also created sonnets that accompanied each concerto. Meyers used the concertos and sonnets as an inspiration for this album, innovatively sampling sounds of nature and creating videos shot against the backdrop of her very own backyard to accompany each concerto.

"That was really a coming-out party for the Vieuxtemps Guarneri," says Meyers, "and it was so amazing to have that wild soundscape covered with nature and four seasons, as well as the triple concerto that I recorded where I did all three parts," which no other classical musician had ever done before.

She eludes further to the album's details.

"There's also a really gorgeous piece on *The Four Seasons* that is kind of like a sorbet by [composer] Arvo Pärt. I thought it would be so interesting to showcase two of the most popular composers, but one who's alive and the most performed living composer on the planet," she says.

After its release, *The Four Seasons* debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Classical Chart.

"I was so humbled and thankful to audiences for appreciating that music," Meyers says, "taking in my perspective of *The Four Seasons*. That was really beyond the coolest thing ever."

THE AMERICAN MASTERS



"[Two albums] was unbelievably daunting when it was happening because it was back to back. I'd never done a double release in one year, ever, and I do not recommend it...if you want to stay sane," Meyers laughs.

The American Masters is equally as breathtaking as *The Four Seasons*, and takes innovation in the world of classical music to the highest level. Meyers utilized the talents of Mason Bates, a 37-year-old musician who's "one of the hottest composers around today," according to Meyers. Impressed by a cadenza he rewrote for the Beethoven *Violin*

Concerto, Meyers asked him to write an entirely original composition. She teamed up with the Pittsburgh Symphony and Conductor Leonard Slatkin to commission the piece, and in 2012, Bates released his first violin concerto, which is inspired by an ancient beast.

"That whole process was such an incredibly rich and rewarding experience for me," says Meyers, who recorded the piece in London as one of the four sections of *The American Masters* album. "I think his concerto was one of the most inventive, creative, important works to have been written in the last 50 years. We've taken it on tour to so many different orchestras, and audiences have gone nuts for it. It's got legs. And you know, it's the story of a dinosaur, so it's got dinosaur legs, I like to say."

The other three sections of the album include the Samuel Barber *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, which was written in 1939, and also happened to be the debut recording of the 18-year-old Meyers, who says repeating the Barber on the Vieuxtemps felt full circle; the national anthem; and a piece that Meyers' husband commissioned John Corigliano to write for the couple's first child, entitled *Lullaby for Natalie*.

The hard work on both these albums paid off because at the end of 2014, Meyers received the news that she was the top-selling instrumentalist on the Billboard Classical Chart.

With the pedal to the metal, Meyers pursued studying the violin and concertizing at full speed. Orchestras and artists throughout the world were interested in working with the masterful young violinist, who traveled to collaborate wherever the opportunity was, and world-renowned composers began to write music specifically for her. She was quickly becoming one of the most popular and highly regarded classical musicians of her time.

Amid her successful career, Meyers fell in love. She met her husband, Jason Subotky, in New York after being set up on a blind date, a date that Meyers first resisted. However, upon meeting Subotky, she was blown away. He, seemingly like everyone in Meyers' circle, is also a musician, having obtained a piano degree from the University of Southern California. (He now works in finance for the prestigious Yacktman Asset Management firm.) Meyers knew from their very first encounter that "he was it." Marriage followed, but what followed next was unexpected.

"We really didn't discuss [having children]. We had just gotten married and it was like, boom: pregnant! I was fertile myrtle," she says, her dimples giving way to another laughing fit. "I was going on tour with Il Divo and just not thinking of it at all. I just went with it."

They named their daughter Natalie Setsuko, Setsuko after Meyers' grandmother, who she describes as "the love of my life" and whose Japanese name means "melodious child." After Natalie was born, the family of three began touring together, sticking to Meyers' strict travel schedule. Natalie was about 3 months old when Meyers had concerts

planned with the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra. They arrived one hour after the 2011 Tohoku tsunami hit Tokyo, an experience Meyers describes as "unbelievable." But nothing, not even natural disasters, could stop Meyers' ambition and drive, and she continued to make raising a child and being a wife work with her career.

Eighteen months after Natalie was born, her second daughter, Andie, appeared on the scene.

"With Andie, I really wasn't planning on getting pregnant so soon," she says, and remembers thinking, "Oh my god, how are we going to do this with two children on the road now? This is crazy!"

Yet she endured.

"I played with the Santa Barbara Symphony, [and performed] a very gutsy, sexy Ravel *Tzigane*, where I'm supposed to be this wild gypsy, and I come out there," at this, she stands up and mimics an extremely large belly and begins to play the air violin, looking like she's going to a limbo dance party, "and I'm 9 months pregnant. ... Like, wow, what a look! What a look that was. Puffy feet, nothing fitting," she trails off with a smile, nothing deterring her determination or stifling the pure joy she exudes when she talks about her family and her career.

However, she does admit to some difficulty when it comes to traveling with children.

"We live every day to the absolute maximum. I don't even know how much more could fit in one day," she says.

Her daughters, who are now 3 and 4 years old, have a schedule that

ANNE AKIKO MEYERS' FAVORITE PLACES IN AUSTIN

Ramen Tatsu-ya

LaV: "I'm a huge fan. They have amazing steak, great martinis too."

Uchiko

Trio: "Awesome Sunday brunch for the entire fam."

Pacha Café: "Hands down, the best pancakes...and I am one serious pancake expert."

Hopdoddy's: "Their shakes are to die for."

Moss

Archive Vintage

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

The Long Center

ON DRIVING IN AUSTIN (A NOTE TO AUSTIN WOMAN READERS)

"I'm the crazy driver out there with lots of road rage. I apologize to all the readers. If you see a crazy lady driving a dark gray SUV with two kids and classical music cranked up to the nines, stay out of the path."

ON WHAT'S ON HER RADIO DIAL

"The blues, jazz. That music is spine-tingling to me. I'm a big classical nut and I tune into KMFA, my buddies over there. They're a great station, as well as NPR and XM Radio. I do have the '80s channel synced up in my car, sadly."

HER CAUSES

In addition to supporting radio stations, composers and orchestras throughout the world, Meyers is also involved in the following causes:

Young Concert Artists Inc.

Ronald McDonald House

Colburn School of Performing Arts

ON WHY SHE DOES WHAT SHE DOES

"I speak through the music. The violin is really an extension of my voice and of my soul. That I'm able to perform and play through this violin, it inspires me and gives me so much and gives audiences so much too. I get letters and people meeting me and crying, or just so happy that they've come to the concert. Some, for the first time in their lives, they've actually heard a classical concert. Experiences like that are incredibly moving. That's the meaning of it all."

WHAT'S NEXT

Meyers' upcoming performances include Mason Bates' *Violin Concerto* with the Lyon Orchestra in France and at the Kennedy Center with the National Symphony, as well as a new album.

"The thing that's so exciting to me is this feeling of reinvention," Meyers says. "I'm constantly listening to what's out there. Hopefully, [I'll work] with electronica and maybe Björk. Who knows? I'm also a huge fan of Brian Eno and artists like that. ... Everything is such a winding path. You never know what's going to motivate you or inspire you. I'm always looking with open eyes, open heart to see what will happen."

ON THE CREATIVE PROCESS

"I'm a very project-driven artist. I get so excited when I suddenly have an idea and it works, and it actually happens. To take an example, the last recording I did this past February with the London Symphony Orchestra, I commissioned six arrangers to re-arrange 10 world premieres of the American Songbook, like Gershwin's *Summertime* and *Someone to Watch Over Me*, and the nostalgic, exquisite music making that happened in the 1940s, and recorded the Bernstein *Serenade* as well. It was such an epic experience to tie that all together and to see it come to fruition. A dream becoming a reality is so empowering."

"I create all the ideas [on these albums]. If I'm not passionate about it, the soul behind it is lacking."

"So many times, I almost feel like I'm a forensic expert, some kind of private investigator, like I'm putting together all these pieces of a puzzle. But it gives me a big picture of so many exciting possibilities. ... You just always respect the foundation. The tradition, the foundation is one of purity."

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE VIOLIN

Made in 1741 by Guarneri del Gesu, the Vieuxtemps, which Meyers played on *The American Masters* and *The Four Seasons* and now exclusively plays, is widely believed to be the best-sounding violin in existence. (Violinists Jascha Heifetz and Fritz Kreisler, both considered to be among the best violinists of all time, made their own Guarneri violins incredibly famous.)

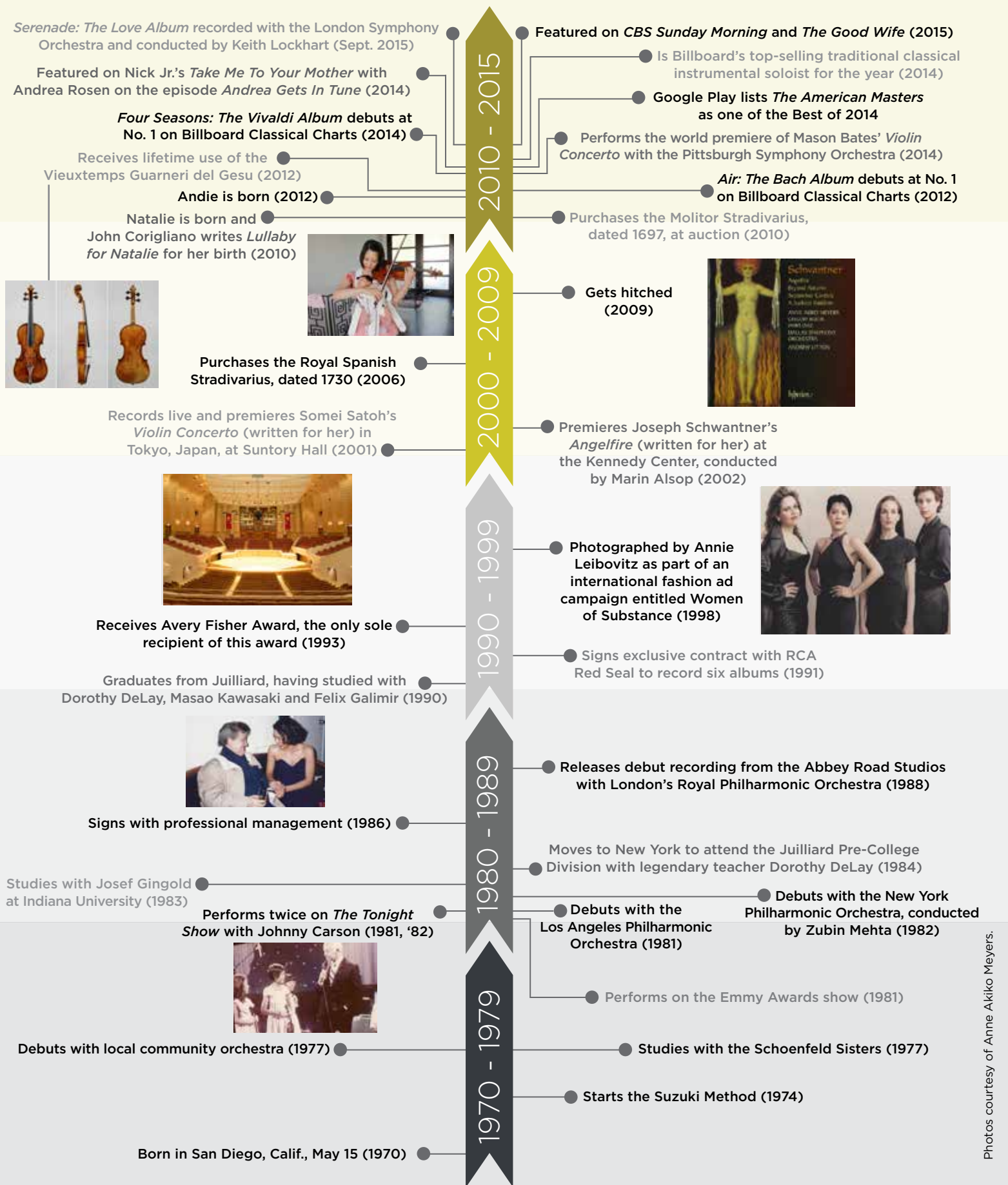
The Vieuxtemps violin, one of 120 violins Guarneri made, had never been professionally recorded prior to Meyers' recordings, and had been sitting under a bed for 50 years. Valued at \$16 million, the Vieuxtemps was given to Meyers by an anonymous donor on a lifetime loan.

Alice & Olivia black and white midi gown, \$1,198; Pelle Moda black Kacey sandals, \$160, available at Julian Gold, 1214 W. Sixth St., 512.473.2493, juliangold.com; Nadri drop earrings, \$45, available at Nordstrom, 2901 S. Capital of Texas Hwy., 512.691.3500, nordstrom.com.



Sachin & Babi ivory and gold zipper tank top, \$280; Tibi Agathe pleated ivory culottes, \$600, available at Julian Gold, 1214 W. Sixth St., 512.473.2493, juliangold.com; shoes, model's own.





“Usually, when I play with a symphony orchestra, it’s a big, meaty concerto. So you’re always in a huge hall. I also really love the intimate recital halls, which allow me to connect to the audience in a different way. I played at a famous jazz club in San Francisco and it was one of the most fun times I’ve ever had. To be onstage and be able to pepper it with my dumb jokes and talk and then play, it was awesome to be just so communicative with the audience. It’s way more personable.”

Elie Saab long-sleeve black gown, \$4,025, available at Julian Gold, 1214 W. Sixth St., 512.473.2493, juliangold.com.

Photos courtesy of Anne Akiko Meyers.

includes preschool, violin, dance lessons and swim class. “Kids thrive on a schedule, so I sometimes feel guilty taking them away,” Meyers says. Even so, Meyers believes that the education her children receive on the road is irreplaceable: the exposure to the music and musicians, to different cultures and places, and to see their mother in her element. When she asks what her daughters want to listen to these days, Andie requests Disney princess music, but Natalie requests classical music. “Music forever will be a part of them, and that’s such a beautiful thing. It’s very organic. Music is life and life is music,” she says. When asked about whether she would want her daughters to follow in her footsteps, she hesitates. “I’m not sure,” Meyers admits. “I want them to feel free to choose, make their own decisions and not feel any kind of pressure whatsoever. Just to have music be a part of one’s life is so special.” Andie’s ears must have been ringing because she bounces into the room with her *Peter Pan* book, her mother’s same style of hair and infectious giggle also in tow. “She’s irresistible. She’s got Daddy wrapped around her little finger,” Meyers laughs. After Andie leaves with her playmates Wendy and Captain Hook, Meyers discusses how having children has affected her career. “It’s completely changed me. After so many years of traveling alone and concertizing, you have to build such strength, to be a chameleon and travel around the world. The thing that gets you through the front door is how you play. You’re always being judged on how you play. But now, my family, they don’t care about that, they just want Mama. That difference is monumental. I always want to be home. They make me laugh every single day. There are many moments when I’m going to pull my hair out too, but it’s so good to have that grounded feeling,” she says, elaborating on the lessons her daughters have bestowed upon her. “They’ve taught me to be not so hard on myself, that you can’t be perfect at everything, that you want to try to enjoy things a little more.” With a career that would make any artist envious and a beautiful and busy family of four, how does she balance it all? Meyers attributes the balance to “the art of planning” and being disciplined not only in her playing and the management of her career, but also in finding time to workout every day. She also acknowledges that her husband sometimes gives her a gentle nudge, asking for “us time” when it comes to spending time together as a couple and a family. She’s come to a place where she has the ability to turn off work as well, whether that means watching a movie at home or going to see a theater performance she likely would never have attended prior to having a family. “My children are introducing me to different things,” she affirms. And that’s the beauty of Anne Akiko Meyers. Turning 45 this month, she has let her music and the people who love her guide her, allowing for constant growth, whether she’s soloing, playing as a chamber musician, recording or educating. She’s always open to experimenting, to new possibilities and development, personally and professionally. She has a big heart, which can be seen in her magically expressive performances, in which she becomes one with her talent. Above all, Meyers is truly a musical genius whose influence has made an invaluable mark on the world of classical music.