

# GWENDOLYN MASIN

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*Biography / Long Version (2022/23)*

*“A daring and exciting performer who ventures courageously into unknown territory with relish.” –  
The Irish Times*

Gwendolyn Masin is one of today's significant concert violinists and an innovator in classical music. She is descendant of a lineage of classically-trained musicians and grew up surrounded by iconic figures in music history, studying with luminaries such as Herman Krebbers, Igor Ozim, Ana Chumachenco, Zakhar Bron and Shmuel Ashkenasi. Aged twelve, Gwendolyn first began travelling back and forth between Dublin and Amsterdam to have regular lessons with Herman Krebbers. She discovered her curiosity for teaching during that time and began chronicling all her lessons, resulting in a vast library of written and recorded documentation. Gwendolyn would be one of Krebbers' last students. She is winner of prizes at the Violin Days in Cape Town in 1989, Nederlands Violconcour (Iordens) in 1990, the Carl Flesch Prize (Baden-Baden) and a Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship in 1996, the Outstanding Young Persons of Switzerland Award in 1998, and all the major Irish music competitions.

Gwendolyn holds degrees with highest honours from the Royal Schools of Music in London, England; the Hochschule der Künste in Berne, Switzerland; the Musikhochschule in Lübeck, Germany; and Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. Her doctoral thesis from Trinity College traces, in

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its first half, a history of written documentation about the violin from 1750 until today. Drawing on personal experience with outstanding violinists, including her own teachers as well as representatives of all the main schools of violin playing such as Boris Kuschmir, Thomas Brandis, Ljerko Spiller, Sándor Végh, Gerhard Schulz and Nora Chastain, the second half of the book is a contemporary history of violin, and it examines the similarities and differences within 20th-century violin pedagogy.

Gwendolyn enjoys a flourishing international career that takes her all over Europe and the United States, as well as Asia, Russia, South Africa, and the Middle East. She has performed extensively on four continents to critical acclaim and has toured as a soloist with various orchestras. Notable partnerships include that with the Saint Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra, Bernese Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra and RTÉ Concert Orchestra of Ireland, Irish Chamber Orchestra, the Hungarian National Philharmonic as well as its Chamber Orchestra, MÁV Symphony Orchestra, Savaria Symphony Orchestra, Concerto Budapest Symphony Orchestra, Savannah, and Georgia Philharmonic Orchestras, Charleston Symphony Orchestra, Belarusian State Academic Symphony Orchestra, Musica Viva Chamber Orchestra (Moscow), Orquesta de Cámara de Bellas Artes (México), and youth orchestras such as the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland and Portugal's Concerto Moderno with whom she recorded the Bach Violin Concertos.

Chamber music plays an important role in her musical life. She has collaborated with violinists Mihaela Martin, Philippe Graffin, Ilya Gringolts, Jan Talich, Kirill Troussov, Isabelle van Keulen and Maxim Vengerov; violists Kim Kashkashian, Vladimir Mendelssohn, Lars Anders Tomter, Maxim Rysanov, Gérard Caussé and Lilli Maijala; cellists Gary Hoffman, Adrian Brendel, Natalie Clein, Gavriel Lipkind, Frans Helmerson, Torleif Thedéen, Julian Steckel, and István Várdai; pianists Kit Armstrong, Aleksandar Madzar, Cedric Pescia, Alexander Lonquich, Hannes Minnaar, Pascal Rogé, Peter Frankl, and György Sebök; wind instrumentalists Reto Bieri,

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Jacques Zoon, Hervé Joulain, Christoffer Sundqvist, and Kaspar Zehnder; singers Rachel Harnisch and Andreas Schaerer; electric bass player Wolfgang Zwiauer; and guitarist Kalle Kalima. Festival appearances include Budapest (Hungary), Prague (Czech Republic), and Seoul Spring Festivals (South Korea), Festival Internacional de Santander (Spain), West Cork Chamber Music Festival (Ireland), Stellenbosch (South Africa), Prussia Cove (England), International Music Festival Koblenz (Germany), Internationaal Kamermuziekfestival Schiermonnikoog and Storioni Festival (the Netherlands). In 2007, she co-founded the *Lipkind Quartet* with the quartet's namesake cellist, of which she remained a member until 2009. The quartet performed with great frequency in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Japan during that time.

Collaboration with contemporary artists is of particular interest to Gwendolyn. In an effort to make music more accessible, she commissions artists, working closely with them and performing their music or integrating their respective art mediums into her interpretations. She's received strong support in such ventures from the Arts Council of Ireland, Swiss city and cantonal departments as well as UBS Bank and Mobiliar Insurance Company, and broadcasting companies such as SRF 2 Kultur, VPRO, NPO Radio 4, and RTÉ television and RTÉ lyric FM. Premiered works include major compositions by Raymond Deane, Thorsten Encke, Thomas Fortmann, Don Li, Urs Peter Schneider, Daniel Schnyder, Eric Sweeney, Dobrinka Tabakova, Martijn Voorvelt, and John Buckley, the latter of whom dedicated his first violin concerto to Gwendolyn. Buckley's concerto premiered in Savannah, Georgia, as the Savannah Philharmonic's season opener to a sold-out Lucas Theatre and was later performed in Dublin with National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland. She also has collaborated closely with authors Lukas Hartmann and Lukas Bärfuss on music theatre productions.

Gwendolyn has recorded for Tonus-Music-Records and Naxos International and in recent years has formed a close relationship with Orchid Classics. Recordings for Naxos include discs

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with her ORIGIN ensemble performing works from the bravura repertoire and solo sonatas by Eugène Ysaÿe, as well as a long-running partnership highlighting live performances at the GAIA Music Festival. Recent releases include a recital programme with Simon Bucher and Bernstein's "West Side Story" with the Melisma Saxophone Quartet. The latter was voted amongst the top ten releases of 2020 by Art Muse London.

Gwendolyn is very active as an artistic director, speaker and producer. Most prominent for Gwendolyn is her role as founding artistic director of GAIA, an annual festival held in Switzerland since 2009, recognised as one of the country's most important. From 2010 until 2014, one of Gwendolyn's mentors, David Zinman, was patron of GAIA. Other notable ventures include establishing the international, multidisciplinary series, *In Search of Lost Time*, in 2004 which has taken place in multiple cities in Ireland and in Berne, Switzerland, as well as *Cocktail für die Musen*, a series for Casino Berne for which Gwendolyn creates elaborate, one-off productions involving classical music and other art disciplines since 2019.

Gwendolyn is also co-founder and co-artistic director of the International Chamber Music Series and International Master Course at Dublin's National Concert Hall together with pianist Finghin Collins since 2016. Faculty members of the summer school have included Mihaela Martin, Frans Helmerson, Lars Anders Tomter, Gary Hoffman, Kim Kashkashian and Gilles Apap. In addition, Gwendolyn was appointed Artistic Director for Ireland's Carrick Music Festival in 2007, a post she held for three years. Gwendolyn has been a jury member at Murten Classics and Kiwanis Musikpreis, both in Switzerland, as well as the World Vision Contest. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Music Instrument Fund of Ireland.

In 2016, Gwendolyn was asked to be a keynote speaker at TEDxBern where she presented the talk, *Better Performance Through Failing Better*. It was followed by a tour of lecture recitals in North America including speaking engagements at Princeton University, Berklee College of

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Music, Georgia Southern University Armstrong Campus and the faculty of music of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

In addition to speaking five languages, Gwendolyn authors books and articles and composes music. In 2009, the award-winning, *Michaela's Music House, The Magic of the Violin*, was published. The book serves to instruct the beginner violinist. It is in three parts and includes Gwendolyn's own studies and compositions. *Michaela's Music House* is available in English and German and is part of the ESTA Edition collection available via Müller & Schade. At the time of publication, Gwendolyn was the youngest female to have authored a violin method. Presently, Gwendolyn teaches violin and chamber music masterclasses at institutes and festivals throughout Europe and North America. She was professor and researcher of violin studies at the Haute École de Musique de Genève, Switzerland, between 2013 and 2021.

In 2020, as a response to COVID-19, Gwendolyn brought *The Exhale* online. *The Exhale* is an online platform and in-person retreat providing professional courses and holistic masterclasses to musicians, practitioners, and artists from across the globe. When it became clear that it would not be possible to host a physical event in Switzerland over the Easter break in 2020, she turned to the internet. Within its first two weeks online, some 1,000 people signed up to take part, with many sessions selling out quickly. *The Exhale* employs more than 90 artists. Faculty members include prominent musicians from all over the world, including cellist Guy Johnston, violinist and Body Mapper Jennifer Johnson, violinists Géza and Réka Szilvay, violists Maté Szücs and Matthew Jones, bassist Leon Bosch, pianists Charl du Plessis and Alan Fraser, singers Claudia Boyle and Roderick Williams, conductor and bassoonist Peter Whelan and children's book author PJ Lynch. *The Exhale* is unique in its holistic approach to music education and offers a sense of normalcy during what has been a highly disruptive time for the arts.

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Since live concerts recommenced during the summer of 2021, Gwendolyn began “Gwendolyn’s Bridge Club”. Patrons of the club can join for as little as one Swiss franc a week. The club democratises the reception and impact of music and the arts. It organises myriad events for its patrons, presenting works that audiences can identify with, without skimping on the need for discourse around important themes which art can represent – from the collective to the individual.

Gwendolyn’s love of playing is founded in her voracious curiosity to understand human nature, musical expression, and the psychological connection between both. She explains, “The experience of live music is everything. To me, it’s the ultimate form of communication, moving us into dimensions that language, for example, cannot reach. A word is not a sentence, but a note can be an entire story.” The pandemic forced people into their homes, and musicians off stages worldwide. In the interim, Gwendolyn gave birth to a son, became a licensure trainee of the Association for Body Mapping Education, a vocal advocate for equality in the arts, wrote several articles for *The Strad*, was a keynote speaker for the annual European String Teachers Association International Conference, and continued practising ashtanga yoga.

Highlights of the 2022/2023 season include a new music theatre production co-written by Lukas Bärfuss around the theme of migration, lost music and the trauma of war. It will be performed in Swiss venues including Basel’s Gare du Nord, Zurich’s Rigiblick, Baden’s Kurtheater, as well as Liechtenstein’s TAK Theatre. Other engagements include playing works by Martinů with the Slovak State Philharmonic Košice, and various duo recitals with pianists Finghin Collins, Caspar Vos, and Vera Kooper in Ireland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Explorations between baroque and contemporary repertoire juxtaposed with improvisations continue this season with electric bass artist Wolfgang Zwiauer. She curates and plays on *Legends*, a new release on Orchid Classics. *Legends* is described by Gwendolyn as a “mosaic” of elements: family ties and teaching lineages that overlap to create a rich impression of an

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interconnected musical world. Composers include Wieniawski, Poldowski, Enescu and Ysaÿe. This programme shines a light on neglected repertoire, particularly on the role of women as integral to the creative achievements heard here.