

# GWENDOLYN MASIN

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*Biography / Long Version (2017/18)*

## **Challenge Life's Definitions**

Gwendolyn Masin is one of today's significant concert violinists. She is regarded as, "a formidable talent that demands attention" (*The Irish Times*), "appearing to merge with her instrument and in so doing, enchanting her audience" (*Thuner Tagblatt*). She is celebrated for, "setting first-rate standards in concert performance with her technically superior, refined, intensive and richly contrasting expression" (*Der Bund*).

Gwendolyn is descendant of a lineage of classically-trained musicians and remembers playing violin as naturally as having a conversation when she was a child. Her family, imbued with musical insight, helped her to avoid, "the pitfalls of child prodigy status" (*Figaro.hu*). Her formative years were shaped by musical instruction, world travel, performing for audiences in reputable concert halls, and collecting accolades internationally – all by the age of five. At eleven she gained national exposure in Ireland after appearing on, *The Late Late Show*. She has been a regular guest on TV and radio shows and has performed in Asia and throughout Europe, Russia, South Africa, the Middle East, and North America.

## **The pursuit of a distinctive voice is driven by timelessness**

Gwendolyn holds degrees with highest honors from the Royal Schools of Music in London, England; the Hochschule der Künste in Berne, Switzerland; and the Musikhochschule in Lübeck, Germany. Her teachers include Herman Krebbers, Igor Ozim, Ana Chumachenco, Zakhar Bron and Shmuel Ashkenasi. Gwendolyn cultivated a distinct style of violin-playing, as well as her identity as an artistic tour de force while carrying out formal studies. "I have had the privilege of collaborating with some of the most acute musical minds of our time. My physical style of playing, as well as my approach to interpretation, draws on this – mixed with my own discoveries." Not only is Gwendolyn an esteemed soloist and chamber musician, she also writes, transcribes music, and advises composers.

## **It's not the genre, it's the music that interests me**

She has performed extensively on three 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, RTÉ Concert Orchestra of Ireland, Chamber Orchestra of the Hungarian National Philharmonic, State Symphony Orchestra of Belarus, 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.

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Gwendolyn concertizes with revered soloists in conjunction with chamber music projects. A few of these musicians are: violinists Philippe Graffin, Jan Talich and Maxim Vengerov; violists Guy Ben-Ziony, Gérard Caussé and Lilli Majjala; cellists Adrian Brendel, Gavriel Lipkind, Julian Steckel, and István Várdai; pianists Kit Armstrong, Aleksandar Madzar, Cedric Pescia, and György Sebök; and wind instrumentalists Reto Bieri and Kaspar Zehnder. Her piano partners are Julia Bartha, Simon Bucher, Urs Peter Schneider, and Bálint Zsoldos. Festival appearances include the West Cork Chamber Music Festival (Ireland), Prussia Cove (England), and Internationaal Kamermuziekfestival Schiermonnikoog (the Netherlands).

## **A profound musician is a performer who serves music, not themselves**

Collaboration with contemporary artists is also a large part of Gwendolyn's repertoire. In an effort to make music more accessible, she commissions artists, working closely with them and performing their music or integrating their respected art and mediums into her interpretations. She's received support in such ventures from various foundations such as the Arts Council of Ireland and Berne's Cultural Bureau. Gwendolyn has recorded for Tonus-Music Records and has lent the voice of her violin to the Swiss film, *Localisation*. She's also premiered works by, amongst others, Raymond Deane, Don Li, Urs Peter Schneider, Daniel Schnyder, Eric Sweeney, 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 in 2013.

Gwendolyn is an International Music Award recipient, was nominated for The Outstanding Young Persons of Switzerland Award for her achievements, and has received support from the Swiss Foundation for Promotion of the Interpretative Arts. Other national and international prizes and awards were won in numerous countries in Europe and South Africa. A recent undertaking is a TV and web-series titled, *Gwendolyn's Playground*, that takes viewers to a myriad of cities around the globe to explore how classical music inspires and influences her, as well as other artists and their audiences. In 2016, Gwendolyn was asked to be a keynote speaker at TEDxBern where she presented the talk, *Better Performance Through Failing Better*.

## **Sound is the last step toward making music**

It is a disservice to Gwendolyn to regard her solely as a musician. Research and application of music methodology are an inseparable part of her undertakings. Her doctoral thesis from Trinity College examines the similarities and differences within 20th-century violin pedagogy. In 2009, the award-winning, *Michaela's Music House, The Magic of the Violin*, was published by Müller & Schade. Authored by Gwendolyn, the book serves to instruct beginner violinists and is available in English and German. "Music is alive, and so personal change and development within its corpus is inevitable. Once an artist knows the rules, they can gain true glee from breaking them and from that, gain a sense of individuality and a freedom of spirit." Presently, Gwendolyn teaches violin and chamber-music masterclasses at institutes and festivals throughout Europe and North America and gives lecture-recitals and talks concerning her areas of expertise. She is Professor of Violin Studies at the Haute École de Musique de Genève, Switzerland, since September 2013. Gwendolyn says, "My students have begun to refer to my classes as 'The Laboratory.' We experiment and question the assumed truths we've been told."

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## The space between the notes creates the poetry within music

The intellectual and philosophical foundations that Gwendolyn has built shape her performances as well as her perspective. She believes that there is a psychological difference between a musician who only performs in concert halls and musicians that come to a performance with a complete understanding of what goes into getting that musician on the stage and the audience in their seats. “If performance were a box, there are those who step *into* the box – the spotlight is on, and they play. I step *out* of the box, into the spotlight and play – with me is a deep appreciation and comprehension of what goes into creating that moment wherein the first note is sounded for an audience.”

This understanding is the result of Gwendolyn’s involvement curating and producing music festivals. Most prominent for Gwendolyn is her role as Artistic Director of GAIA, an annual festival held in Switzerland, recognized as one of the country’s most important. It brings together acclaimed musicians for a long weekend of concerts and community. Gwendolyn also co-directs and produces the audio and visual media that is showcased as part of GAIA, in collaboration with Naxos, the world’s leading classical music group. Other notable ventures include establishing the international, multidisciplinary series, *In Search of Lost Time*, for which in 2004 *The Sunday Business Post* stated, “mark her down as a daring and exciting young performer who ventures courageously into unknown territory with relish.” In 2007, Gwendolyn was appointed Artistic Director for Ireland’s Carrick Music Festival, a post she held for three years.

## Music transcends that which cannot be put into words

The 2017/2018 season is witness to new recordings, performances and publications by Gwendolyn. In September she curated and began performances of a six-concert series with renowned pianist, Finghin Collins, at the National Concert Hall, Dublin. Other concerts will take her to the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Lithuania, Italy and France. This season also sees the publication of the German translation of, *Michaela’s Music House, The Magic of the Violin*. The tutor is in three parts and includes her notes and compositions. It is now available via Müller & Schade. Gwendolyn will also teach masterclasses in Italy, Portugal and Ireland. In November 2017 she debuted, FLAME (Orchid Classics), an album made with her long-standing duo partner, pianist Simon Bucher. It features repertoire ranging from Debussy and Ravel to Stravinsky and Szymanowski. The FLAME programme will tour venues in Switzerland and Germany. In 2017, Masin released ORIGIN, (Fountainhead Productions in collaboration with Naxos), a collection of the compositions and improvisations that are the basis of her bravura repertoire and encores. She has performed the ORIGIN programme with her ensemble in seven countries and will continue to do so in 2017/2018 on tour in the Netherlands, and in Ireland and Hungary.

Gwendolyn’s intrinsic ability to play the violin is not simply inherited, but founded in her voracious curiosity to understand human nature, musical expression, and the psychological connection to said expression. She explains, “I feel that music is a perpetual companion and my life feeds and informs my love for it and vice-versa. 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.”