

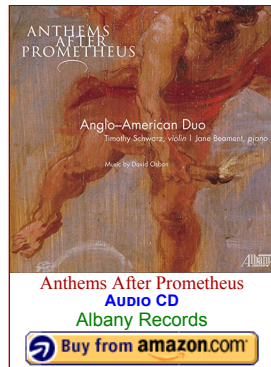
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Feature Article by Maria Nockin

Timothy Schwarz: Virtuoso Violinist and Caring Teacher

Ever since violinist Timothy Schwarz made his solo debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra at age nine, he has been praised for the perfection of his technique and the energy of his performances. He has recorded solo and chamber music discs for Naxos, EMI, Marquis Classics, and Centaur. His recording of Pulitzer Prize winner Jennifer Higdon's music was one of the *Philadelphia City Paper's* Top Ten Classical Albums of the Year. With *Anthems after Prometheus*, the newly released Albany Audio CD of works by British composer David Osbon, his Anglo-American Duo, with pianist Jane Beament, makes its recording debut.



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Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Abington, PA, which is a suburb of Philadelphia. I suppose there was the average amount of music in my public schooling, but most of my musical activities took place at music schools where I went for lessons, theory, and chamber music.

Do you come from a musical family?

Yes, I come from a very musical family. My grandfather was a professional violinist in Louisville, KY. He played with the Louisville Philharmonic, taught hundreds of students, and was the church organist. My aunt and uncle both went to the Juilliard School of Music and made their living playing the violin on Broadway. My aunt eventually became a public-school orchestra director in Queens, NY. My cousin also plays violin on Broadway, and her late husband, Mitchell Stern, was the first violinist of the American String Quartet. He was a violin professor at the Manhattan School of Music and at the University of the State of New York at Stonybrook. My sister was a professional violinist, although she does not play much anymore.

When did you become interested in music as a career?

With so many violinists in the family, it is not too surprising that I was strongly encouraged to start playing at a young age. When I was nine, I won a competition that resulted in me soloing with the Philadelphia Orchestra. My mom was not a musician but was a very famous physicist. She was one of two female physicists in the USA at the time. When I won the competition, she decided to quit her career and oversee mine. She was a true "Tiger-Mom" and practicing became the central part of my life until college.

During college, I became very involved in meditation, and various aspects of spiritual life. I seriously considered becoming a Franciscan Priest for about two or three years. After completing my Master's Degree, I spent a summer in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at a center for meditation and while there I volunteered at Day Care Centers for homeless children. I did not bring my violin, and it was the first time since the age of four that I had been away from the violin for more than 48 hours. I missed it tremendously, and it was then I realized it was a part of who I am. To deny that would be denying myself. Even though I had two degrees in violin performance, I consider that summer as the time I truly committed

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to the violin on my own terms. That was in 1993, and I have never looked back since.

Is the United States a good country for the working classical musician?

You can make a living, but you have to be creative in your thinking. I think the era of making a living purely as an orchestral musician is basically coming to an end. This could, however, open up a new world for musicians if they are creative. I think conservatories and music departments need to lead the way in a new line of thinking about music as a career. I have traveled a lot in Europe, and they have a much greater appreciation for classical music. You sense it everywhere. I have not performed in South Korea, Japan, or China, but I imagine there is a lot of respect there as well.

Who are some of your favorite composers?

Bach and Brahms are among my favorites, although I really do love anything from the Baroque, Romantic, or contemporary periods. I am not as fond of the Classical period and I rarely perform flashy showpieces, although I do enjoy hearing someone else perform them.

What can you tell us about David Osbon and his works that is not in the recording booklet?

I have known David for almost 20 years. He and his wife, Jane Beament, were in Philadelphia in the 1990s, when David was doing a Ph.D. in composition at the University of Pennsylvania under George Crumb. I met Jane and David during that time, and we performed together in various ensembles. We reconnected about eight years ago, which is when we formed the Duo. Although he looks somewhat intimidating, David is an incredibly intelligent and kind person. He is about six feet five inches tall and has long, Nordic-looking hair. Actually, he is one of the gentlest people I have met. He is extremely passionate about teaching and devotes long hours to his students.

Are there many composers of music for the violin who should be better known and more often played?

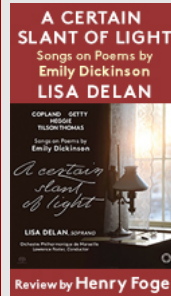
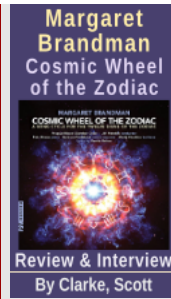
Yes, there are many, including Amy Beach, Mary Howe, William Grant Still, Paul Schoenfeld, John Corigliano, Kareem Roustom, and Saad Haddad, just to name a few.

Are there more works by Osbon that deserve to be better known?

I really admire Osbon's orchestral work *Liberty*, which is an overture about Philadelphia. Premiered by the Curtis Symphony Orchestra in Philadelphia, it was recorded for Albany Records by the Czech National Symphony. Osbon also wrote three fantastic piano sonatas, which Beament has recorded. All are certainly good works to program!

Who were your most important teachers?

I had the great privilege to study with two famous and quite different teachers for my Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, Dorothy DeLay and Sylvia Rosenberg. But by far my most influential teacher was Helen Kwalwasser, who taught me when I studied for my Doctorate of Musical Arts at Temple University. Helen was one of the original students at Juilliard under Ivan Galamian. She remembers having dinner with Rachmaninoff, and was friends with Stravinsky, Mischa Elman, and other legendary figures. Unfortunately, she passed away last May. Although he was not a violinist, I was also greatly influenced by Maestro Hajime Teri Murai, who was the conductor at the Cincinnati College Conservatory and at the Peabody Institute. He coached me extensively in many concertos, including the Bartók Violin Concerto No. 2, which I performed with him conducting. This performance won several awards, including the 1992 Best Performance in Maryland by the National Endowment for the Arts.



Editorial

Is Fanfare Now the Magazine for Serious Musicians?

By Joel Flegler

Editorial

The Problem of Label Advertising and Artist Support

By Joel Flegler

Critics' Corner

A Critic's Response to The Problem of Label Advertising and Artist Support

By Phillip Scott

Letter To The Editor

Buying Spree!

By David English

Are there any artists or musicians from the past whose work has significantly influenced you?

I am very impressed by composers who, for whatever reason, did not have the training available to composers or musicians of more affluence. Because of their race or gender, some very talented musicians had less access to a successful career in music. A good example is William Grant Still.

Where do you teach?

My full-time job is head of strings at Rowan University in New Jersey. I teach violin and viola majors, both performance and music education students. Also, I lead the Rowan String Ensemble, which is a conductorless string orchestra that I work with as concertmaster. In addition, I have a small studio of very talented high school students.

What do you like best about teaching?

To be honest, I like almost everything. I love the personal interaction, and the incredible influence I have on my student's lives, as well as the influence they have on me. I have taught students from wealthy suburbs, extremely poor cities, and from countries all around the globe. Each student brings unique challenges and opportunities for growth.

What is your teaching philosophy?

I see teaching as an apprenticeship. I go way beyond music with almost all of my students. Usually, the first few years of teaching are devoted to learning technical skills, with the clear understanding that this must turn into creativity. I try to enable my students to think on their own, and to be able to learn how to solve problems. Musically, I always probe them to look into the deeper meaning of the music. When they have good technical skills, this becomes easier for them to do.

What have you learned from your teachers that you want to pass on to the next generation of musicians?

Every student is different, and each will learn things in his or her own way. Dorothy DeLay used to say that if students were not ready to hear something, they would not fix it no matter how often you said it. She would let certain things go until she felt the student was really ready to do something about it. I greatly admire that!

What important performances do you have coming up this season and next?

This season has been extremely busy with my performance schedule. I have been subbing with my former string quartet, the Serafin String Quartet, while my replacement is on maternity leave. That has included concerts in Oklahoma, Florida, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. I have also been performing a series called Music from the Underground with pianist Dan Weiser and bassist Xavier Foley. All of the composers on this concert program are of African descent. We have been performing this program in North Carolina, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New Mexico. In May, I will perform the Khachaturian Violin Concerto near Philadelphia. Then the summer starts. I will be teaching and performing at the Techne Music Festival in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, as well as the Rowan String Camp in Glasboro, New Jersey, and the Premier Orchestra Institute in Jackson, Mississippi.

What do you expect to be doing five years from now?

Most likely I will be teaching a very diverse class of students, and using music to advance social justice issues throughout the USA. One of the reasons I took the position at Rowan University is the commitment there to using music to advance social justice ideas. This year we have a series committed to this, which you can view at academics.rowan.edu/cpa/music/Music%20of%20Social%20Justice.html. This is a good start. However, I also think it is very important to actually

take my students to musical events in cultures that are very different from where they grew up. You don't have to go far to do this. *PlayOn!Philly* and *Project 440* are two inner-city Philadelphia groups that we collaborate with a lot. We have a few Rowan students who are from both systems, which adds tremendous diversity.

In 1995, I won the Artistic Ambassador Competition, which took me on a nine-week tour of very unusual places including Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh to perform violin and piano recitals of music by American composers. I did three of these tours before 9/11. I really saw the value in actually being in a different country and talking to people who live there, especially people with a common interest of music. So, long term, I would love to take a select group of students to South America or someplace like that, where they can interact with musicians and music teachers, while learning about their culture. We might have to start with Europe until it gets underway, since a lot of the American students have never been out of the country.

I firmly believe that the problems of social justice can easily become so overwhelming, it is easy to become paralyzed and do nothing. So I try to focus on ways I can make a difference in a meaningful way, knowing it might have influence well beyond what I can see in the small form.

What recordings do you have out in addition to the Osbon?

This is my sixth CD released on a label. Centaur recordings include a solo Baroque violin CD, a CD of live performances, and a CD of American quartets. I also recorded a work of American duos for Marquis Classics and EMI, and a CD of early works by Jennifer Higdon for Naxos.

Who made your violin and your bow?

I am extremely fortunate to own a Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, made in 1830. It is a Maggini model, which means it is slightly larger than most violins. This is very rare, and it gives the violin a contra-alto-like sound. I have never heard a violin like it. My bow is an Ouchard, very flexible but also strong. They are among the loves of my life.

How much modern technology do you use in your work?

David Osbon has been pioneering in this field. One of the works on the CD, *Into the Sun*, was written as an interactive work. A solo violin in one place interacts with choirs, dancers, bands, and other artists from around the world. For the CD, it was condensed to a form that was more practical, but performing it with the original intent would be very exciting.

How do you feel about downloads replacing compact discs?

It is inevitable. If someone wants to just purchase one track of a work, I see nothing wrong with that. I do think it is unfortunate that recordings seem to be replacing live concerts.

Do you have time for a private life?

Rarely, but I try. I have a spouse, Mark. He is a nurse who practices with the oncology population at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. We don't work together professionally, but we both share passion for our work, and in helping people in different ways.

Do you have any interesting hobbies like cooking, painting, or reading?

I love nature, and a perfect vacation would be hiking at the ocean or mountains.

About eight years ago we took an amazing trip. We drove from Glacier National Park in Montana to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. The obviously stunning sights lived up to the hype, but even more amazing were the unexpected moments: coming across a town which was

basically a cross street, having a great meal, seeing a huge valley and later learning it was the base of a volcano that exploded millions of years ago. It was just incredible.

Another very special place is Provincetown, MA. I usually go there in May, before the crowds come in. Walking on the beach is just stunning—the sand dunes tower above you, and sometimes it is so foggy you can't see a foot in front of you. When that happens I have to follow my own footsteps in the sand back to my car. It is a great place for meditation.

What kind of music do you listen to for relaxation?

I grew up in the Madonna generation, and I love her music. I also love listening to Whitney Houston, Tina Turner, and Broadway.

OSBON *Prometheus Sonata*.¹ *5 Hommages*.² *Into the Sun*.³ *Still Waiting for the Revolution*.⁴ • 1,2,4 Jan Beament (pn); Timothy Schwarz (vn); ⁴Lorraine Deacon (vc) • ALBANY 1712 (51:43)

American violinist Timothy Schwarz and English pianist Jane Beament open this recording with composer David Osbon's 2017 work the *Prometheus Sonata*. Osbon is associate dean and head of graduate studies at the London College of Music, which is part of the University of West London. Schwarz and Beament are the members of the Anglo-American Duo. Beament is also Osbon's wife.

In Ancient Greek mythology, Prometheus was one of the Titans. Listening to the first movement, "Titanic Dances," I imagine Prometheus and his fellow Titans dancing on the deck of the ocean-going Titanic as it approaches the fatal iceberg. Violin and piano play a fascinating dance as they dialogue with great flair. Schwarz's violin plays the story while the piano shows its playful aspect. Zeus sent Pandora, the first woman, to earth with a container full of terrors and tells her not to open it. She opens it and everything dreadful flies out. The music begins with soft and thoughtful phrases that eventually become a fiery dance. Only hope remains. According to the myth, Prometheus was just as unlucky as the passengers on the ill-fated ship. It took Hercules to rescue him from torture by an eagle who pecked out his liver daily. Here, the violin plays dramatic double-stops, while the piano plays winged phrases that speak of the bird flying around the cringing Titan.

The *Five Hommages* for violin and piano, written in 2017, present the personalities of five musicians and tell of the influence each has had on David Osbon. They are: composers Edward Elgar, Ludwig van Beethoven, Olivier Messiaen, George Crumb, and violinist Nigel Kennedy. Each miniature contains a musical portrait of a musician whose style, character, and teaching have had a significant influence on the composer's work. Because there are some easily located musical references, particularly in the homages to Elgar and Messiaen, it is fun to pick them out. In their rendition of these miniatures, the Anglo-American Duo exhibits solid technique, and imbues it with great sensitivity. *Into the Sun* is based on solo passages from Osbon's Violin Concerto, which Schwarz commissioned in 2015. It starts with a slow, deliberate procession from the shadows of night into a burgeoning, multicolored sunrise. I can imagine waking up on the northern coast of Maine to see the first sunbeam drench our land with its golden aura. Perhaps some reader will visit Glacier National Park this summer. Schwarz's superb, idiomatic play of *Into the Sun* needs to be heard on that park's main thoroughfare, the Going to the Sun Road. No matter where we hear it, this album, titled *Anthems After Prometheus*, is an excellent collection of David Osbon's fascinating compositions played by musicians of great virtuosity.

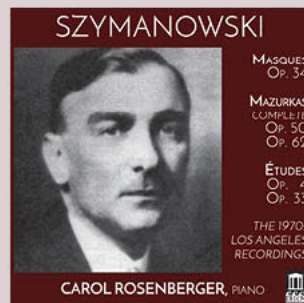
Osbon's unusually constructed piano trio *Still Waiting for the Revolution* won a chamber music prize at the Clements Memorial Competition. Said to be made up of musical aspects of the American Revolution, it was written between 1999 and 2000, when Osbon resided in Philadelphia. He used Minimalist techniques and American folk songs such as

Shenandoah, combining the mélange with occasional boogie-woogie rhythms to achieve a unique result. The Anglo-American Duo and cellist Lorraine Deacon play it with great virtuosity and intriguing musical colors. Excellent sound that keeps the violin, cello, and piano separate helps make this a fine recording that I think readers will want to have in their collections. **Maria Nockin**

This article originally appeared in Issue 41:6 (July/Aug 2018) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

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