

Gift of music from a gifted musician

Rachel Barton Pine aims to put instruments in the hands of disadvantaged young players

By David Gordon Duke

RACHEL BARTON PINE

With Vancouver Symphony
Orpheum Theatre
Saturday and Monday, 8 p.m.

American violinist Rachel Barton Pine makes her Vancouver debut this weekend in a pair of concerts under the baton of guest conductor Giancarlo Guerrero, newly appointed music director of the Nashville Symphony. Pine is considered one of the most exciting of the new crop of fiddle players, and it's about time Vancouver audiences got a chance to scout her out.

Her saga is, to put it bluntly, a story in itself: a child prodigy, she was on the fast track to stardom when an appalling accident -- she caught the strap of her violin case in the doors of a Chicago commuter train and was dragged several hundred feet -- changed her life forever.

While her long, arduous road back from the tragedy is nothing less than heroic, it's now back story. Taking a lead from Pine's promotional materials, I wanted to chat about the present and the future, not the past, when she had a few moments to talk after a master class at California's University of the Pacific.

A whirlwind of enthusiasm and energy, Pine is as self-aware as any musician I've ever interviewed. With more creative irons in the fire than you can count, she's remarkably interesting: causes and projects such as honouring the legacy of U.S. violinist Maud Powell, publishing, new CDs are all part of her current very busy life.

Getting good instruments into the hands of young performers who come from less-than-affluent backgrounds is one of her pet projects. Most of us know that Strads and other fine old instruments are expensive; how expensive leads to sticker shock on the grandest scale.

"A good bow to go with your Strad will set you back \$150,000," Pine says. "You can get an antique French stick for about \$40,000." But they can make a difference; small upgrades in instruments may only make marginal improvements. "You're really much better off getting a decent bow, because it's the bow that draws the sound out of the instrument."

Her Rachel Elizabeth Barton Foundation helps match promising talents with good instruments. "I got access to a decent learner violin through grants. So I want to pay back what I owe to the wonderful people who supported me as a young performer, by encouraging contemporary young people."

Pine's website lovingly describes her two current instruments. That's right, two, since she ambidextrously plays both modern and baroque instruments, and wryly notes that her "modern" violin is actually older than her baroque instrument. "I can move back and forth between them now. It's the equivalent of becoming bilingual. Sometimes, depending on the repertoire, I use a Baroque bow on a modern instrument, if for example I'm playing Bach and Beethoven in the same program."

"As a musician you don't want to be just perfect, you want to be ideal . . . Live performance has different values: The response from the audience can give you ideas you would never dream of no matter how long you worked alone in a practice room. You don't want people to leave a concert saying, 'She played the notes perfectly,' you want them to come out saying 'Wow, that piece really moved me!'"

Her analogy for the power of a live concert experience then takes a perhaps unexpected turn: "I get inspiration from my favourite rock and heavy metal bands, who just get up there and express their entire beings to every member of the audience. I try to do the same thing with the more sophisticated palette of classical music."

It's a tall order, but after our interview, and a nice critical listen to Pine's latest CDs, I'm prepared to bet she'll deliver.

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun

Retrieved from:

<http://www.vancouversun.com/entertainment/Gift+music+from+gifted+musician/2131716/story.html>