

5 MINUTES WITH . . . MIDORI

Violin superstar **Midori** has been a staunch supporter of arts education for underserved children since she created her foundation, Midori and Friends, in 1992. Music Sharing, her Tokyo-based music-education foundation, also provides free programs to children, and incorporated the International Community Engagement Program (ICEP) into its offerings in 2006 to support international cultural exchange.

ICEP sends a string quartet (Midori and three other young musicians between the ages of 20 and 30, chosen by audition) abroad to mainly rural areas with limited access to live music, where they perform at schools, hospitals, and other institutions. The quartet later shares their experiences via performances throughout Japan.

The most recent ICEP trip was to Nepal in December 2016, and Midori, violinist **Jeremias Velazquez** (Argentina), violist **Wenhong Luo** (China), and cellist **Michael Katz** (Israel) are touring Japan this June to communicate their findings.

—Megan Westberg

What inspired the ICEP concept?

ICEP is a part of the Music Sharing organization, and we had our first project in 2006, making the 2016 Nepal visit sort of our tenth

SHINOBU SUZUKI



JUILLIARD SCHOOL LAUNCHES OPEN CLASSROOM

Juilliard has announced **Open Classroom**, a new series of online performing-arts courses. The subjects studied range from dealing with performance anxiety to music theory, and each course lasts six weeks.



AVERY FISHER CAREER GRANTS AWARDED

The **2017 Avery Fisher Career Grants** have been awarded to violinists **Chad Hoopes** and **Stephen Waarts**; the **Dover Quartet**; and pianist Haochen Zhang. The prize is worth $25,000 for each musician or chamber ensemble.

anniversary. Through ICEP and other activities of Music Sharing, we aim to connect young people and children with music. We bring music to children; we help train young musicians about the nuts and bolts of community engagements. Through music, we engage in cultural exchange and sharing opportunities.

Music Sharing started its activities in 1993, as a Japanese branch of Midori & Friends. It creates programs in Japan to bring high-quality experiences and direct [contact] with music for schoolchildren. (It became an independent organization in 2002, having separated from Midori & Friends NY and becoming registered as a charitable organization in Japan.) Through ICEP, we also want to train young, exciting musicians to become committed and successful community-engagement presenters.

When players are auditioning to be a part of ICEP, what are you looking for? What, beyond musicianship, helps you and the Music Sharing committee choose between candidates?

The audition is conducted with videos, essays, and interviews, in two rounds. We look for, beyond musicianship (which goes without saying), eagerness to learn, to share, and to commit, as well as communication skills in English. We don't particularly require past outreach experiences. We finally look for compatibility as well, as it is a chamber-music program.

How do you choose which countries to visit?

The selection of the final country of our visit is decided by the board of Music Sharing, in consultation with some government- and non-government-related offices, including the United Nations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Can you share an experience from the Nepal trip that illuminates the program at its best, where you felt ICEP had made a special connection with its audience?

I feel that there are always so many experiences in both parts of ICEP (in December and in May/June). Every visit is different, of course, and for me, meaningful. I learn a lot about my own relationship to music, and I get to observe the young musicians' experience as they stay together in the project for what turns out to be about almost five weeks total.

The upcoming ICEP activities are focused on communicating throughout Japan in schools and other facilities about the December trip to Nepal. How are these concerts structured? How much of the performance is music versus talking about your experiences?

There are various presentations being planned for the Japan portion of ICEP. (When ICEP came into being, we were able to bring the ICEP musicians into our existing programs in Japan, including the school and hospital visits, the program for children with special needs, etc.) There are also two formal public concerts in concert halls in Tokyo and Osaka, in which we perform full-length quartets, get interviewed about our experiences from our December visit, and show photos and videos.

Children are always curious how we came to be a quartet, and why we are actually playing together, and in explaining, we already start the process of describing to them the *raison d'etre* of ICEP.

Our school and hospital concert visits vary in size and length. We are committed to quality of experience, and this means that we also frequently work with a smaller number of children for each presentation, but give multiple concerts within the same institutions. In hospitals, sometimes it is for one patient or it could be for the ward; in schools, it could be for a single class or for a grade, for example.

What do you want children and audiences in Japan to understand about your experiences in Nepal?

As in any presentation anywhere, I want people and children to take whatever they can.

What have you learned about yourself, both as a musician and a cultural ambassador, through the ICEP trips?

I have learned so much through my ICEP and other community-engagement experiences. Most importantly, these trips give me opportunities to reaffirm my commitment to the cause of exchange, sharing, caring, and appreciating music, and to think about the role we all can play in sharing peace, as well as the [difficulties] of the human condition to which we are all subjugated. From [this] we must at least realize how full of self-fulfilling desires we are, lacking in objectivity. I think about many topics, which can loosely be about sharing, environment, access for all people to quality of life. What I might think of as the norm is malleable and almost always subjective.

How do you hope ICEP empowers the other ensemble members after the program is over?

A number of musicians apply to participate for a second time in ICEP. (A musician can actively participate in two cycles through auditioning.) They will each take with them what they have experienced and internalized through the process and apply it in the rest of their personal and public lives.

For more about the ICEP trip to Nepal, read the participants' accounts on the blog at musicsharingweb.wordpress.com.

MILESTONES



Violist **Dimitri Murrath**, a first-prize winner of the **Primrose International Viola Competition**, has been appointed as a full-time faculty member at the **San Francisco Conservatory**.



The **Music Institute of Chicago** has recognized violinist **Rachel Barton Pine** with the **Dushkin Award**, which highlights international figures in music for "their contributions to the art form, as well as to the education of youth."



The **Royal Academy of Music** has appointed violinist **James Ehnes** as a visiting professor of violin. He will begin his role with a master class in June.