

Hanne Kaisik: I was watching you working – you had a very hard day today. Are you satisfied with the result? You were listening to a piece you recorded.

Midori Goto: Whenever there is a recording we have to come and listen to the first edits which is always a very exciting part of making a recording. But it is also a bit stressful. What if it actually didn't quite work out? It is always nice to know that the technology works and there will be something we can work with. So it was a long day but I am very happy that now, at the end of the day, it seems like it was worth it.

Hanne Kaisik: So it was worth all the travelling ... you arrived from where today?

Midori Goto: Today I flew out from Rome, last night was the last performance on the 'fall European recital tour'. Prior to Rome we were often in London. This fall has been very interesting with performing in different places and cities. And many of them where I have come back to in the last 30 years at least twice or three, four times. But of course it's the anniversary season, there seems to be an extra sort of excitement on the part of both the presenters and the performers. And of course anniversary season concerts will continue and in a way giving concerts and preparing as well as teaching and practicing. These things seem to be really such a normal part of my season, but somehow it is being connected with the 30th anniversary. There's something I feel that makes it different and exciting, and of course in Munich in early spring, I will be working with Zubin Mehta. Back in 1982 when I made my debut on stage, he was the conductor. He was the one who gave me the opportunity to play with the New York Philharmonic. Then there will be recitals, very often in Germany of course, recitals in Stuttgart, Berlin and so forth. But in other European cities as well, London again, Vienna...

Hanne Kaisik: Is it true that you prefer travelling by train?

Midori Goto: No.

Hanne Kaisik: So I heard wrong. Somebody told me that you don't like to fly so much... But you're flying anyway – you have to come from the US.

Midori Goto: I think if I have a choice between traveling on the train and on the plane, I just really do my math, and by the time I get to the airport and then waiting, flying and finally getting to the city center... Sometimes

that actually doesn't make sense but it would be a lot easier to travel by train. And of course on the train, I can read and I can do all kinds of things as well. And I leave from and arrive in the city center. So, it's not that I prefer trains, but I take what is more convenient.

Hanne Kaisik: So time is important. I just heard you talking about your schedule, and I was very impressed to hear that you remember almost every day. You knew the dates and you remembered what you were doing, and you also know what you are doing until May or June or almost next year. I think this is really incredible.

Midori Goto: I plan my schedule very carefully. Especially because of my teaching responsibilities. And of course we book our flights and do the travel arrangements a few months before the actual date. So, things happening in March, April and May are not so far away. And because I'm so careful about the way I actually go back to be with my students, that's always so much in the forefront of my consciousness.

Hanne Kaisik: I just asked you about time, and you said: 'Time finds me.' But does it really find you? I mean, it seems to me that you don't have any time for, let's say, private things. You may read on your train journeys or on the plane, but how do you manage your private time?

Midori Goto: Somehow time gives me many options and many choices. And, I am able to read, I love to read. Sometimes I go for a walk or I listen to things. Somehow time does find me.

Hanne Kaisik: You mentioned Zubin Mehta at your debut in New York – was it the Brahms Violin Concerto? Could you talk a little bit about that time in the beginning? Do you remember what was going on then?

Midori Goto: My debut came in 1982 in New York with the New York Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta, and it was in late December. I had just moved to New York with my mother from Japan earlier that year. It was my first winter in New York and a very exciting time. To be able to play with an orchestra was so exciting. And even though I give concerts now so much more frequently, every time I walk on stage there is this excitement, and this is something I have always felt and something that really makes me keep on going back on stage to perform.

Hanne Kaisik: Are you nervous before you go on stage?

Midori Goto: I am often asked this question. And the answer is that I am more excited about being able to go out and play the music I love so much. So I don't think of it as a nervous experience. It doesn't make me feel like I am scared or anything like that, which I know is sometimes what my colleagues say about how they feel from time to time before appearing on stage.

Hanne Kaisik: Are you a kind of perfectionist?

Midori Goto: I don't particularly consider myself a perfectionist. No, not at all.

Hanne Kaisik: But supposing you are, for example, working on notes, a score like today, and you are listening very carefully? I watched you and I had the impression that you are very very precise and almost perfectionistic.

Midori Goto: No, absolutely not. I just hear what I hear. But perfection for me in my mind can never be achieved. Of course I think we all strive to be better than what we are right now. And perhaps that's one way we try to get closer to being perfect. But we also know that it's not possible ever to become perfect. And in fact I think there is, in music at least, much imperfection when one seeks only perfection. And when one thinks perfection has been reached, then there's something very imperfect about it.

Hanne Kaisik: I find that very interesting because I sometimes think: if it's too perfect it doesn't live. There's no emotion, no real feeling. I played the material we shot in Hamburg and I showed it to a friend of mine. She has nothing to do with this business. I just wanted to mention it ... and she started crying when she saw you play. I was very surprised because I didn't expect this reaction. Do you have experiences like that with people that come to hear you play?

Midori Goto: I think that I myself have had situations when somehow a particular experience or a series of experiences had just naturally evoked some very strong emotions in me. And I think we all have these experiences. I don't always know what people experience through listening to music, but I think it's possible.

Hanne Kaisik: Do you have a piece that touches you most or which you prefer? Which piece do you like to play more than others?

Midori Goto: I really enjoy things from very different pieces. I actually have been doing something very very interesting as part of my anniversary celebrations, and it's partly because I get this question: What is your favorite piece? Or: Which composer do you like the most? And my answer is that I love the variety, and the more I get to play the pieces, I start to see so much detail and the diversity that comes out of realizing all these differences, and that's what I like the most. It's not a particular piece or a particular composer. But by being able to play so many different pieces and by being able to closely examine all the details, I start to see many unique characteristics or elements, and being exposed and becoming aware of these things, this is what I really enjoy. So yes – I don't know if this answers your question, but there's no particular piece, but because I get to play so many pieces, each of them means so much more to me.

Hanne Kaisik: Maybe we should talk about the Brahms Violin Concerto now. I don't want to go into detail, but if you think of this concert, what is the ...

Midori Goto: The challenge ...

Hanne Kaisik: Yes, the challenge for you ... ?

Midori Goto: To be able to play any piece is so unique in a way, to be able to learn it and to really look at it closely. And of course we do this every time we practice a piece of music. It doesn't matter how many times I've already performed this work, but each time you pick it up you learn something new about it. And Brahms has been a consistent companion for me for a long time. In 1982 I made my debut with the New York Philharmonic, and in the same year, I was also learning to play the Brahms concerto. And of course I would learn pieces and I wouldn't necessarily perform them – I practiced back then, as I do today, not for the sole purpose of preparing for a performance but because that was a way of life. And so through that process I learned the Brahms concerto. And it's such an incredible work. What does it teach you? It teaches you about yourself, about the technical issues of playing the instrument. It teaches you about breathing, and about freezing, and about many other things.

Hanne Kaisik: Interesting, we are looking forward to February when we do it.

Uli Aumüller: We were just arguing in the team, before you came in, about physique. I said that an instrumentalist like you has to train the body in such a way that this training becomes something of a torture. At least it would be for someone like me who never did anything like it. A sort of self torture that seems to become a natural thing.

Midori Goto: I never think of it as torture.

Uli Aumüller: Is it training, this hard training? You began at 4 years or may be at 5 years old. Does it come naturally to you or do you have to get your body used to those specific movements.

Midori Goto: There is a very physical component to playing the violin. So one has to keep oneself very fit, whatever that means. It doesn't mean that you have to go to the gym and do the exercises that way. But rather, violin-specific or instrument-specific exercises. And one of the most important things is that one understands how one's body works. And everyone is different. And I notice this also when I work with younger musicians. Everyone's body and hand shapes are different, hand sizes, arm and neck lengths are different, so there isn't one particular way of holding the bow or one particular way of putting the violin under your chin. One has to find one's own way. Every school of violin playing tries to achieve good control of the sound, so that it's not just a generic sound but it gives you the freedom of specific expression, and also to be pain free. So while different schools approach different things differently, the goal for all the schools I believe is ultimately the same – to have the sound, the tone, the ability to create the tone and to express through the tone and to be pain free.

Uli Aumüller: The German musicologist Eduard Hanslick was a contemporary of Brahms, and he was against Tchaikovsky and against Mendelsohn and he loved Brahms. For him music was not about emotions, but he said music is a system of musical figures. Figures of sound, nothing else. Like an abstract painting. But besides this, it is a fact that music can evoke emotions, and for Hanslick, Brahms was an example for his theory. So for you, where are the emotions? In the music or just in the listeners or in the musicians?

Midori Goto: I think one of the key elements of music making and music performance is in the interaction and in the communication between the creator or the producer and the receiver. And one person can actually be

both. ...a performer, a player, could be the producer of sound but also the receiver of the music from the creator, the composer. And then of course the listener could also be the creator of unique subjective experiences. So it is a very interesting thought that by being engaged in music, whether through listening or performing or playing or writing, I think one is on both sides: being the giver and the receiver. Sometimes as a player it's an interaction between the sound that comes out of the instrument and what reaction is evoked subjectively. Where it could be an interaction between the player and the orchestra or with the conductor. But I think the meaning of music actually is in the interaction of the experiences – and of course experience, emotional experience has so much to do with each person's unique subjective history, personal history. So I think this is one of the reasons why no two persons can ever have exactly the same experience. And it gives music a potential for so many different ways of being received and of being presented.

Uli Aumüller: You say there are so many different subjective experiences and impressions about listening to music.

Midori Goto: There are also shared experiences

Uli Aumüller: How does this happen in a concert hall? There's something special going on in a concert hall, right? So, there are many many people in a concert hall, and you said that everybody is different. But there is a common denominator.

Midori Goto: Hm, a shared experience. We breathe the same air and there are certain shared qualities, but then how we internalize these experiences I think is different for each and every one of us.

Hanne Kaisik: When you started your career – and you're only 41 now – and you look back on 30 years, did you expect that in the beginning? You're sitting here and perhaps you say: oh no... I still have 30 years.

Midori Goto: No, actually I always enjoyed performing and I loved the music of course. I loved spending time with music and practicing and getting to know more pieces and being involved in music very much. But I didn't think of a career as a musician until much later. And in fact I was already performing almost full time before I realized that maybe this is actually a career.

Hanne Kaisik: What would you do if it stopped now, for whatever reason. Would you have an alternative for your life?

Midori Goto: When I was just growing up, there were all kinds of things I was interested in and I had many childhood aspirations and I was very interested in becoming an historian, I was interested in becoming a nun, I was interested in becoming a diplomat, but I think most seriously, I was very interested in becoming a clinical psychologist.

Hanne Kaisik: But you could still do that?

Midori Goto: I could ... and I still try to keep up with some of the reading, which I enjoy very much. And it is also something I am able to completely put out of my life. It is just fascinating how the individual mind works, but just reading about theories and all the studies ...

Hanne Kaisik: So you could be a psychiatrist sometime ...

Midori Goto: I would be very interested in doing research and learning more and just really becoming involved. I am always interested in that.

Uli Aumüller: Is there a link between psychology and music – for you?

Midori Goto: I think there are many different schools of thought on that. I think that when I play music my entire self becomes involved. But one could say exactly the same thing about any other profession. It's something that completely involves me as a person. So anything that has influenced me greatly would naturally become a part of my music. And of course psychology did have a very important part because I studied it in college and in my graduate studies. But I could say the same about the music – about the role that music played in my psychological studies. About the discipline, about the way I think about freezing and sometimes the repeatability of the sequences ...

Hanne Kaisik: Thank you very much.