



Nicolas Koeckert

Interview with Simon Kravis

Nicolas Koeckert is a young classical violinist from Munich, Germany who has won a number of international violin competitions and



played with many orchestras around the world. He has made a number of highly acclaimed recordings, most recently of the Khachaturian Violin Concerto with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by José Serebrier on the Naxos label. He came to Australia in April to play as guest soloist with the Canberra Symphony Orchestra, where he performed the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with staggering virtuosity. Watching him was like watching a Cirque du Soleil acrobat, constantly defying expectations what is humanly possible on the violin. Like Martin Hayes, his masterful technique does not distract from his love of communication and teaching. He talked with Simon Kravis for Fiddle News after returning to Germany.

Q. You describe your nationality as German-Brazilian. Tell about the Brazilian side of your family.

My maternal grandfather emigrated to Brazil before the Second World War and married there. So my mother was born in Sao Paulo.

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Fancy Yourself Fiddling Rehearsal

Sat 13th June 2009

Fiddle Orchestra:
Beginners -2pm
Ensemble -3pm
Advanced - 4pm

**Father Flanagan's,
484 Smith Street
Collingwood Vic.
Down Stairs Function
Room
Entry \$15**

Quotes

"A squeaky engine he apply'd, unto his neck on northeast side, Just where the hangman does dispose, To special Friends the Knot of noose."

**Crowdero the fiddler
from Hudibras by
Samuel Butler 1612-1680**

"An Irish tradition maintains that it was the play of the wind on the dried muscle fibres of a dead whale that presented man with the first idea of a stringed instrument."

Hortense Panum c. 1940



Nicolas Koeckert 1.

Q. When did the violin first register with you?

It was when I got my first half-size violin from my grandfather as a present. It was a little Italian Mantegazza and I was 8 years old. I discovered the sound possibilities and really fell in love with it. I got a personal relationship with the violin through this experience.

Q. Had you heard much playing before this violin was given to you?

I had heard it but I was not seriously interested – I played because all my family played. My paternal father and paternal grandfather played in orchestras and my grandfather had founded the Koeckert string quartet that performed all over the world – all my family are musicians. I was really more interested in tennis until I was 11 and I loved sport. I wanted to be a tennis player much more than I wanted to be a violinist and I played tournaments quite successfully. When I was 12 I heard Viktor Tretyakov playing the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. This was my key adventure that made me decide to become a violinist. It inspired me so much – I have never been so uplifted in my life. I told myself that one day I wanted to play like him, and I realized that tennis wasn't the thing for me. From that time on, I spent all the time after school with violin so as to learn as much as possible.

Q. How much practice have you done at different phases of your career?

It varied – when I was at school on some days I would play for 2 hours, and on other days less but I always made sure I played the violin every day. Now I do 4 to 6 hours each day to prepare for a concert sometimes more.

Q. Are international competitions a good way for a violinist to develop?

Yes, I think they are very important. They played a strong role in my life but I can't say they are my favourite activity.

In general, I don't like the idea of fighting against other musicians, but it's good to prepare a program, to improve yourself and to know that you can do this.

If you win prizes it helps your self-confidence and helps you get contacts and opportunities for concerts. But winning a prize even in the biggest competitions doesn't automatically make you a career.

Q. You play a Stradivarius. Where do you get it repaired?

I play an Omobono Stradivarius from 1711 – he was a son of Antonio Stradivarius. It's provided by a sponsor. I get it repaired by a violin maker in Munich He's been taking care of it for a couple of years now.



Nicolas playing his 300 year old violin

The varnish comes off if you sweat and needs to be touched up sometimes. It's a miracle that the violin still works as it's made of wood, not metal. Every month or two I have to check the varnish, whether the tuning pegs are working and if the soundpost is OK. The violin shouldn't be opened because it might change the sound.

Q. Have you played any modern violins that come close to your Stradivarius?

Not really It's hard because all my life I've been spoiled by playing old Italian violins..

For sure there are wonderful modern instruments which can be as loud as the great Italian instruments. But the warm, sweet timbre in the sound and the special secret of almost 300 years combination of wood and varnish are difficult to copy. But I know some colleagues who play very nice modern instruments.

Q. Is a teacher very important for your development as a classical musician?

Absolutely!. For the violin there are a huge variety of technical difficulties,

how to hold the bow, the violin, preparation of the left hand, co-ordination of left and right hand together, sound and vibrato aspects etc.. The most important thing after you study is to be able to work by yourself. If you don't get a good teacher when you are young with a lot of knowledge and experience you can easily hinder yourself from playing well even though you have the talent. This is a big problem nowadays because there are so many talented pupils not many great teachers who can really take responsibility for them. But the teacher only can give advice - the main work you need to do yourself. My main teacher was Professor Zakhar Bron. He also taught Vadim Repin and Maxim Vengerov. I studied with him from 1999 to 2007 in Cologne. I myself love teaching.

Q. As well as performing, you also give master classes. How do you organize them?

Sometimes when I do a concert some students ask



if they can come and play for me. I love to teach, to give something and to inspire other people. It's satisfying to express yourself through lessons as well as by

performing. It's my goal to teach more regularly in future and be a professor somewhere in a good high school or music college.