

MY VIOLIN, My Voice

conceived and performed by Amy Greenhalgh and Joe Hanrahan

Violinist (AMY) walks out.
Followed, some moments later, by Actor (JH)
They shake hands. AMY sits.

AMY: intro to THEME; can continue under the initial dialogue

JH: The violin. The violin speaks. It sings. It soars.

AMY: Theme takes off for a bit

JH: The violin has a voice. The voice of the player. The voice of the composer.
The voice of the violin maker.

AMY: continues and finishes Theme

JH: And with this voice, the violin tells stories. Stories of a glorious past, stories of love, of tragedy, of courage. Stories of the human spirit and soul.

These stories, these wonders, come from an instrument of seemingly simple construction. A hollow, wooden body, usually of spruce or maple. This particular violin is made of
(gestures towards Amy's violin)

AMY: Spruce AND Maple.

JH: Spruce and Maple. Thank you.

Four strings, played by drawing a bow across the strings.
(AMY demonstrates)
In special cases, striking the strings with the wooden side of the bow...
(AMY demonstrates)
JH: ...called col lego.
And sometimes, by plucking the strings with the fingers.
(AMY demonstrates)
Pizzicato.

JH: The violin, as we know it, first appeared in 16th century Italy. It evolved from the earliest stringed instruments - the lyres of the ancient Greeks, and its later form developed by nomadic Arabian tribes. The earliest violins came from families of violin makers, or luthiers, as they are called.

The prominent violin making families came to be the Guarneris and, particularly, the Stradivaris.

The classic violins they made are some of the most sought after, by collectors and performers both, some of the most valuable and expensive instruments in the world. As old as many are, they still set the standard for perfection in craftsmanship and sound, and violin makers to this day try to come as close to this ideal as possible.

After all, these classic instruments came from generations of violin makers, passing down their hard learned expertise and secrets over decades to the future luthiers in their families.

It was in 1626 that King Louis XIII of France helped bring the violin to prominence, as he established an official, autonomous orchestra to play for him, introducing violins as a major part of the ensemble.

It would be many, many years later that the first violinist of any orchestra traditionally became its Concertmaster - the person responsible for the tuning and the playing of the orchestra. If you've been to the Symphony, it is the Concertmaster who is the only person to shake the hand of the Conductor when they make their entrance.

But it was in 1626 that King Louis introduced the violin to the world of classical music.

And then the significant composers of the day were writing for this exciting new instrument - People like Archangelo Correlli of Italy, and Heinrich Biber of Germany.

Here, a bit of the very earliest music written for violin - a Chaconne from Heinrich Biber.

AMY: Plays Biber's CHACONNE

As time went on, some of the greatest composers of all time wrote for the violin - Vivaldi, Bach and Beethoven. And they created music, that then, today and tomorrow, will continue to be some of the most beloved in the world. Here an excerpt from Spring, by Antonio Vivaldi

AMY: Plays Vivaldi's SPRING

JH: And, of course, the violin continued to be a central instrument in compositions into the modern era, brilliant pieces from composers like Elgar, Bartok and Samuel Barber. Here, from Edward Elgar, Salud Amor.

AMY: Plays Elgar's SALUD AMOR, continues it under through much of the "Lady Blunt" segment

JH: This incredible music is available to all of us for listening and enjoyment. But the violins themselves - the original Guarneris and Stradivarius instruments - can be possessed by only a few. And those physical pieces of hand-crafted art have achieved values almost beyond imagining.

Like the “Molitor” Stradivarius. It was rumored to be owned by Napoleon, then by Gabriel Molitor, a general in the French army and a musician. It stayed in his family until World War I, then changed hands many times until it was purchased at an auction in 2010 by violinist Anne Akiko Meyers for \$3.6 million - a world record at the time for an instrument sold at an auction.

That was the record until the very next year. It was the “Lady Blunt” Stradivarius, named after one of its owners in the 19th century. It was owned by several private collectors until a private sale to the Nippon Music Foundation in Japan brought over \$10 million. But a 2011 earthquake and tsunami caused hardship throughout Japan, and it was put up for auction. And that auction resulted in a purchase price of \$16 million.

Perhaps some of the value of the “Lady Blunt” stemmed from the fact that it had hardly ever been played by anyone, and wasn’t subject to the alterations that happened in the 18th century to many classic violins - so it was almost in original condition.

And, so, honoring the “Lady Blunt” - Amy will now...

(AMY prepares to play)

...not play anything.

(AMY places her violin by her side. JH listens for a moment.)

JH: But an instrument that may be in even better shape than the “Lady Blunt” - the Messiah Stradivarius. It was the only violin Stradivari made that he didn’t sell. The “Lady Blunt” is 302 years old now, older than the United States, and it is in pristine condition. When a French luthier, Jean Baptiste Vuillame, purchased it, and waiting for its delivery, raved about its qualities, his son-in-law said, “Your violin is like the Messiah; one always expects him, but he never appears.” But they agreed this majestic violin had finally appeared. It was eventually sold to W.E. Hill, who operated a prestigious violin shop in London. His family bequeathed it to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England. Its estimated value today - \$20 million.

JH: Amy...How many millions is your violin worth?

AMY: It’s not for sale.

JH: Ah, thank you. Though there are many more, the final, very valuable instrument we’ll mention is the Stradivarius Red Violin...so-called because of its original red varnish, and famous for its mysterious history. Crafted in 1720, it disappeared for 200 years, and finally surfaced in Berlin, in the 1930s. It was put on auction in 1990, purchased for a 16 year old American virtuoso, Elizabeth Pitcairn. It was no mystery where the money came from to purchase - her grandfather had founded the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company.

Those missing 200 years inspired a film, from 1998, directed by Francois Girard, entitled The Red Violin. It features an international all-star cast, an array of exciting locations, a waltz through some very significant eras in history, and a series of very dramatic, very coincidental, very fictional stories about those missing 200 years. The soundtrack of the film was composed

by John Corigliano. And it won the Academy Award for Best Score,. Amy will now play some of that Oscar-winning soundtrack, as, Spoiler Alert, I tell the story of the film, The Red Violin.

(Amy plays MUSIC STING at each changing location, then plays RED VIOLIN score under story of the movie.

JH: The film begins in 1861 in Cremona, Italy...

AMY: DRAMATIC STING, then MUSIC under

JH:...which was the home of Stradivari. There's a fictional violin maker - Nicholas Bussotti. He's kind of like Stradivari, but he's not Stradivari. The film has recurring images of Tarot cards, and a fortune teller which will foresee the developments in store. We'll skip over those Tarot cards, but suffice to say, they symbolize the shocking events that are to come. In the first major plot turn, Bussotti's wife, pregnant with their first child, dies in childbirth. Bussotti, in despair, finishes his violin with red - with red varnish and with the blood of his wife. (That's dramatic license.)

The violin makes its way to an orphanage, in Vienna, 1793.

AMY: DRAMATIC STING, then MUSIC underl

JH: Its given to a young prodigy, who begins practicing and learning with it. He's kind of like Mozart, but he's not Mozart. But the boy has a heart problem, and as his mentors push him to perfect his playing - his heart gives out and he dies. Seems like this Red Violin has a curse on it or something, huh? Those damn Tarot cards. The violin is buried with the boy, but in due course, grave robbers steal the violin, and take it to England.

So we find ourselves in Oxford, England, 1890.

AMY: DRAMATIC STING, THEN MUSIC UNDER

JH: A nobleman, Lord Frederick Pope, finds the violin in a traveling gypsy camp. He recognizes it for what it is, and he successfully composes and plays with the Red Violin. Pope is kind of like Paganini, but he's not Paganini. But he loves this violin. He also loves a woman, who is a writer.

She travels to Russia, to research a novel. When she returns, after some time away, she finds Lord Pope in the arms of a gypsy woman. Enraged, she tries to shoot him, but she hits the violin, damaging it. She leaves him, and he commits suicide. He leaves her his entire estate, but blaming the violin, she gives that to his Chinese servant. The servant returns to his home in Shanghai, and then sells it to an antiques dealer, who meticulously repairs it. (We'll talk more about repairing one of these priceless instruments in a bit.) The antiques dealer sells it to a young woman, who has a daughter interested in the violin.

JH: So we're in Shanghai, and it's now the late 1960s.

AMY: DRAMATIC STING, THEN MUSIC UNDER

JH: The Chinese cultural revolution is underway, and “bourgeois” items, Western artifacts, are being denounced and destroyed.

The daughter of the woman who bought the violin is now a political officer, named Xiang Pei, and she is successfully defending the persecution of her music teacher, Zhou Yuan. Afterwards she gives the Red Violin to her teacher. But Xiang Pei is under suspicion, the Red Guards raid her home, and send her away for prosecution, but after she’s passed the Red Violin to her teacher. Years later, the teacher Zhou dies, and the authorities find his dead body among a “sanctuary” of dozens of instruments. The government gathers them, and sends them to Montreal for auction.

Now we’re in Canada, 1997, for the conclusion of the saga.

AMY: DRAMATIC STING, THEN MUSIC UNDER

JH: (What else can go wrong with this violin, huh?) Samuel L. Jackson plays an appraiser named Charles Morritz, who arrives for the auction of the instruments from China. Morritz is from New York City, and he has a daughter, who is a violin prodigy. He recognizes the Red Violin. He sends a sample of its varnish to be tested - and testing reveals the varnish is mixed with the human blood - of Nicolo Busso’s wife. (At the same time, he purchases an exact duplicate of the Red Violin from a private collection in London.) He reveals to the auction manager that this is the mythical Red Violin.

And that revelation at the auction boosts its sales price into the millions. But in the excitement, Charles Morritz has switched the real Red Violin with the duplicate he purchased. And the film ends with Morritz calling his wife and asking to speak to his daughter. And he tells her he has a special present for her when he gets home.

In one movie, The Red Violin, you find all the passion, the mystery, the twists and turns, the human drama - and, of course, some of the great music - that you’ll find everywhere with the violin.

AMY: FINAL FLOURISH OF FILM SCORE

JH: The Red Violin - one of a small group of magnificent, very rare violins. It is recorded that Stradivari made 1,100 violins in his life. Of those, about 600 are still in existence. But of those, only 244 are accounted for.
More mystery.

JH: And maybe just as mysterious, is the ultimate question, just what made these instruments what they are? So beloved, so valuable. Well, craftsmanship. The artistry of the luthier, of course. It is said Stradivari took the basic model of the day, and then made it slightly wider, slightly bolder.

AMY: You have to control it. But it makes you want to take it to the edge. It’s been compared to driving a Formula One Race car.

JH: A Stradivarius is a perfect acoustic box. Or acoustic machine.

AMY: Almost limitless in what it can achieve, and then, it offers even more potential for growth.

JH: What made it that? A special varnish? A specific wood, from a specific region, from a specific time?

AMY: A delicate, timeless beauty. With the power to play in the largest concert halls.

JH: JH: "NEWS FLASH. This just in. Only a few weeks ago, scientists from Texas A&M University and National Taiwan University revealed research that proves that the great violin makers actually used chemicals that may have helped produce the instruments' great sounds. These chemicals were used to prevent worms from eating their violins, because worm infestations were very widespread at that time.

Now hopefully that doesn't take away any of the magic of these incredible instruments.

Worms or not, the greatest violins, up to this day, will inevitably be found playing a Stradivarius violin, or one from Guarneri del Gesu.

AMY: The Strads have a lighter, cleaner sound. While the Guarneri sound is a bit darker.

JH: Now violinists will say they don't really consider these instruments theirs.

AMY: These violins were around before them. And will be long after. The violinist is just its keeper.

JH: And just as The Red Violin movies focused on these beautiful, but very old instruments, it also acknowledged the reality that over hundreds of years, they can be damaged - though not always by a bullet from a spurned lover.

And their repair can be quite a piece of work.

A notorious case took place near Los Angeles in 1953. A violent storm was battering the area, and the violinist Sascha Jacobsen was driving along the coast when huge waves engulfed his car. He was saved by passersby, but his Stradivarius Red Diamond violin was swept out to sea. Three days later, a local lawyer found it on the beach. He and his wife were music lovers, and they'd read about the lost violin in the paper. The instrument was badly damaged and it was rushed to Hans Weissler, who was the only violin restorer west of Chicago. It took him 700 hours of work, but he made the violin whole, and it made Hans Weissler a legend.

Another, more recent case of violin rescue came in 2008. Violinist David Garrett had bought, and paid for, over the years, a 1772 instrument made by Giovanni Guadagnini, an alumnus of Stradivari. He made his last payment for the violin in December, 2007. Two weeks later, Garrett played a Mendelssohn concerto with the London Philharmonic.

AMY: (up from chair) And I was there. I was part of the Philharmonic violin section that played behind Garrett.

JH: Garrett was only playing in the first half of the evening. His family was there, and he was eager to join them.

AMY: Some of my fellow musicians and I were in the alley during intermission, smoking.

JH: It was a rainy evening, and Garrett didn't anticipate the slick steps where he was rushing down. He took a classic, slapstick fall and rode down a long flight of steps using his violin case like a sled.

AMY: He bounced off the bottom of the steps, and saw us.

JH (as Garrett): "I just...I just...I just played in there...with my violin..."

AMY: We looked at him, like, "We know. We were there. We played with you."

JH: (as Garrett): "But I...I...I fell...on my violin."

AMY: And we looked at him and...(a look and a shake of the head. AMY returns to chair)

JH: But after 8 months of work, and \$200,000 in cost...Garrett got his violin back.

The Red Violin was perhaps the most violin-centric film ever made, but there have been others. You might remember the 1939 film, GOLDEN BOY, based on a Clifford Odets play. That was William Holden's break-through role. It was later turned into a 1964 Broadway musical, starring Sammy Davis Jr. It was the story of a young man who had to choose between become a concert violinist, and a championship boxer. Amy, you never...boxed?

AMY: Shakes her head "No"

JH: Then there were some of the true stories, and biographies. In 1988, Anthony Quinn played STRADIVARI in a fairly standard biopic for Italian television.

Then then in 1989, Klaus Kinski, European superstar, Bon Vivant, certified madman and crazed collaborator with Werner Herzog, directed and starred in the title role of Paganini. Niccolo Paganini was the most celebrated violinist of his time, or almost any time. From a very young age, he astounded audiences with his playing. He was called "the Devil's Violinist," and it was rumored his mother had sold his soul to the devil so he could achieve his skill.

But it's no rumor that musical historians agree that Paganini established a new standard, a modern approach for all future players. It is said in the art of playing, there is just before - and after - Paganini.

We certainly aren't able to appreciate Paganini's work, but video and audio have enabled us to hear some of the other giants of the violin from the past 100 years or so. Masters like Fritz Kreisler, who played with a distinctive warmth and intimacy.

AMY: plays a bit in KREISLER'S style

JH: And then there was the distinct tones and sound of Mischa Ehlman.

AMY: Plays a bit in EHLMAN'S style.

JH: His career flourished until he caught Heifetz disease.

But every violinist caught Heifetz disease, when Jascha Heifetz entered the scene. He played with the speed of a tornado, and with the clarity of perfection.

AMY: Plays a bit in HEIFETZ' style

JH: He was almost considered a god among violinists.

But then an angel appeared. Yehudi Menuhin. He was called the most natural of all players, his music was magic. It came straight from his heart to yours.

AMY: Plays a bit in MENUHIN'S style

JH: From his heart to yours. And that makes us think of another movie the 1999 film MUSIC OF THE HEART.

It was based on a documentary about Roberta Guasperi, who co-founded the Opus 118 Harlem School of Music, and fought valiantly and successfully for musical education funding for New York City Public Schools. Originally cast as Guasperi was Madonna. She studied the violin for many months before she left the film, citing the ubiquitous "creative differences" with the director. So Meryl Streep took on the role and the violin., and she learned to play Bach's Concerto for two violins for the film.

AMY: Plays a bit of Bach's CONCERTO FOR TWO VIOLINS

JH: Both Streep as actress, and the theme song of the film were nominated for Academy Awards. Music Of The Heart was written by Diane Warren, who has also given us and films such Oscar-nominated songs as Nothing's Going To Stop Us Now from the movie MANNEQUIN, Because You Loved Me from UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL, and I Don't Want To Miss A Thing from ARMAGEDDON. Here, some Music From The Heart.

AMY: Plays theme song from MUSIC OF THE HEART.

JH: The violin has leant its dramatic chops to other works of popular literature and film. Foremost, of course, Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle. Holmes was an excellent violinist - according to his sometimes somewhat prejudiced colleague, Dr. Watson. Holmes owned his own Stradivarius. He idolized Paganini, who Holmes, if not fictional, may have seen perform when Holmes was a very young man. And he wrote a monograph on the Dutch Renaissance composer Orlande de Lassus, which according to the hero-worshipping Watson, was the last word on the subject. Holmes did prefer German music over French or Italian, as in Mendelssohn's "Lieder," with an excerpt played now by Amy.

AMY: Plays Mendelssohn's LIEDER.

JH: At the end of one of Holmes' most difficult cases, he said "There is nothing more to be said or done tonight, so hand me over my violin and let us try to forget the miserable weather and the still more miserable ways of our fellow man."

(As JH takes violin stance of Holmes and mimics playing, AMY does one more STING from Mendelssohn's LIEDER.)

JH: That was me...playing air violin.

Violins were also front and center in the Aubrey-Maturin series, 22 books by Patrick O'Brian about the exploits of a Royal Navy battleship during the 15 years of the Napoleonic Wars. The books focus on Naval Officer, Captain of the ship, Master and Commander Jack Aubrey, and ship's physician, naturalist and spy Stephen Maturin. Elements from 13 of these books combined to make up the film, MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD, starring Russell Crowe. It was nominated for 10 Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and it won Oscars for Best Cinematography and Sound Editing. The two lead characters, Captain

Aubrey played by Crowe and Maturin, played by Paul Bettany have little in common beside their duty and service to the Crown, and their love of music. To relieve the pressures of fighting Napoleon, they play duets on board - Aubrey on the violin and Maturin on the cello. So imagine - you're on the deck of the HMS Surprise. With your glass on the lookout for the sails of Napoleon's fleet. When from below deck, you hear the strains of Mozart's 3rd Violin Concerto.

AMY: Plays Mozart's 3RD VIOLIN CONCERTO

JH: Both Russell Crowe and Paul Bettany learned to play their instruments for the film, and Crowe purchased his own violin to practice. It wasn't a Stradivarius, but it was an 1890 model from Leandro Bisiach, which Crowe bought at auction for \$100,00.

Other actors, when called upon to play the violin in front of a camera have learned to play, including performers who have embodied Sherlock Holmes, like Basil Rathbone who all but introduced the character on film to the world and Benedict Cumberbatch more recently on TV.

Many other famous personages from the entertainment world also played violin, not on film but for their own enjoyment. These included Charlie Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich and Larry Fine. Yes, that's Larry of the "Mo, Larry, Cheese!" Three Stooges.

And just as Aubrey and Maturin escaped the challenges of maritime warfare with their music, the unimaginable pressures of creating a country during the American Revolution resulted in several significant violinists - including Ben Franklin, Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson.

And it's in the classic American musical, 1776, where Martha Jefferson sings of her husband's very, very regular playing to relieve his stress as he was creating the Declaration of Independence, in the number, He Plays The Violin.

AMY: Plays HE PLAYS THE VIOLIN.

JH: He plays the violin. All of this great music created; all of these great stories enhanced - by the voice of the violin, a simple instrument, made of spruce or maple. Or both.

There have been violins made of other materials. Whalebone, aluminum. And from a Derek Jeter Louisville Slugger baseball bat. It was fashioned by Glenn Donnella of the National Symphony in Washington, D.C. He used it to play the National Anthem at a game there.

And a violin can also be made of...bed slats. Which might be all you have to use in a Nazi concentration camp.

In 1944, Clair Cline of Tacoma Washington was a U.S. Air Corps pilot flying a B-24 when his plane was shot down over Germany. He was sent to Stalag Luft 1, jammed pack with Allied POWs. With all of them wondering, this late in the war, how the Nazis would determine their fate in the last days. Stalag Luft 1 was a dismal place, but it was said the prisoners' greatest enemy was depression and despair. They had little space or spirit for any but the smallest, most limited diversions.

One day Clair Cline heard someone begin to whistle a quiet tune. And the song immediately brought back a time when he was a young boy, the music he heard, and the evening when a grizzled old fiddle player shoved an instrument into his hands, and said, "It's yours, Red." So Cline decided to make himself a fiddle. I'm not going to go into his whole, insane process, involving soaking the wooden bed flats for weeks in water so they would bend, carving out the hard droplets around the rungs of chairs to get the carpenter glue he needed...or obtaining the the varnish and catgut for strings from friendly guards in exchange for precious American cigarettes.

When he finished, he sat in the center of the camp, and played.

So imagine, you're in a Nazi POW camp, unsure of what the next few weeks, or days, will bring. When you hear a sound, music from home. Offering some of the strength and spirit you desperately need to survive.

AMY: Plays RED RIVER VALLEY, continues under following paragraph

JH: Cline's bed slat violin survived the war, and in 1955, he contributed it to the new World War II Museum aboard the aircraft carrier Intrepid in New York. And he was further honored when it was played by the concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic, Glenn Dicterow, at the Museum's celebratory opening. Dicterow said, "I expected a jalopy of a violin. But it looked good and sounded wonderful. An amazing achievement."

The violin speaks. It has its own voice. And that of its player, a composer, and a luthier.

Of this piece of spruce or maple, or both, Louisa May Alcott said it was "The most human of all instruments."

And perhaps a final word about it from another famous amateur violinist, and a fairly smart guy - Albert Einstein - who said "A table, a chair, a bowl of fruit, and a violin. What else does a man need to be happy."

AMY: Plays just a bit of conclusion to THEME we heard in the opening moments

JH: Now, my words have covered just a small bit of the lore, and certainly a very tiny bit of the music that comes from the violin. We encourage you to explore your own favorites. And those favorites don't have to come from classical music.

The violin has also been much loved in the country fiddlings of Charlie Daniels and the Cajun fire of Doug Kershaw...in the smooth jazz stylings of Jean-Luc Ponty and the alternative rock of Laurie Anderson. And everything in between.

So to end our presentation, let's turn this versatile, brilliant, magical instrument to a modern classic.

This song was written in 1954 by Bart Howard. At the time, the title of the song was a dream, a fantasy. But it's become a reality in our lifetime.

And, during this past difficult year and a half, perhaps it's become a wish some of us may have had.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Fly Me To The Moon.

AMY: Plays FLY ME TO THE MOON.

At the conclusion of the music, JH swings an arm to single out AMY.
AMY bows, nods back to JH for his bow. They bow together, and leave the stage.

THE END

