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Pauchi Sasaki

5 MINUTES WITH VIOLINIST PAUCHI SASAKI

There's a good deal of attention paid to rethinking the parameters of "classical" music. Violinist, composer, and performance artist Pauchi Sasaki has been at work expanding the definition of her instrument itself. Her work defies conventional descriptions, and Sasaki was selected last year as one of seven emerging talents for the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative.

The program (in place since 2002) connects extraordinary young artists with leading masters in different artistic disciplines. The mentors personally select the protégés with whom they wish to collaborate on the basis of a worldwide search. For the current cycle of the initiative, composer Philip Glass chose Sasaki and has been mentoring her throughout the past year.

Sasaki, 35, was born in Peru to a family of Japanese heritage and has studied with such composers as Pauline Oliveros and César Bolaños, as well as with the classical Hindustani legend Ali Akbar Khan and klezmer violinist Alicia Svigals. Sasaki's adventurously interdisciplinary outlook has led her to augment her identity as a violinist and composer with multimedia elements and a strong interest in new technology.

To this end, Sasaki has designed complex hybrid instruments of her own, such as the "speaker dress" (a "wearable sound sculpture built with 96 speakers, six amplifiers, and microphones") and an electronic "extended violin" with an attached micro-controller board that allows "serial communication of data."

Sasaki took time for a conversation via Skype to discuss her artistry, her unique approach to the violin, recent projects, and the mentorship she has been receiving from Philip Glass.

—Thomas May

You started studying classical violin at an early age, but then started gravitating toward other kinds of music for the violin. How did that happen?

I started playing flute at the age of two and then had piano lessons at four. I was visiting the house of my godmother when her children were having violin lessons, and I was desperate to know more about this sound, so I asked my mom to buy me a violin. But at that time it was difficult in Lima to get a 1/16th-size violin, so I had to wait until they could bring one back from Japan. I then started to take classes in classical violin at five.

I also became interested in popular music, such as the Andean violin, which has a very rich tradition in Peru. Each town has its own ornaments and accents, so I started to do research on that while I was studying for my journalism degree in Lima. Then I fell in love with the klezmer violin and went to New York to study with Alicia Svigals. After I heard a concert by Ali Akbar Khan in California, I decided I need to study with this maestro as well. I went to his school in San Rafael until he passed away in 2009.

By this point I was already working on lots of film scores, so I decided to earn an MFA in electronic music and recording media at Mills College. I really wanted to develop my own aesthetic in the realm of electronic sounds.



JUILLIARD SCHOOL APPOINTS DAMIAN WOETZEL

The **Juilliard School** has appointed **Damian Woetzel**, former principal dancer with the New York City Ballet, as its new president. Woetzel, who is currently director of the **Aspen Institute Arts Program** and artistic director of the **Vail Dance Festival**, will take over for current president **Joseph Polisi** in July 2018.



M-PRIZE COMPETITION NAMES WINNERS

The **Argus Quartet** received first prize in the senior string category at the **M-Prize** competition, earning the quartet \$20,000. In the junior strings category, the **Astera String Quartet** took home a prize of \$5,000. The grand prize of \$100,000 went to Russian Renaissance, a group made up of a balalaikist, domra player, button-accordionist, and contro-balalaikist.

And now you've added Philip Glass to your impressive list of mentors. How did that come about?

In the Rolex program, someone has to nominate you, so I didn't even know I was a finalist until just before I met Philip Glass. In December 2015, I received an unexpected email from Rolex asking me to submit a portfolio, and then in April was invited as one of three finalists to New York to meet with Philip. Each finalist had a meeting with him at his house.

We talked about my experience and his own time working in Peru in the early 1980s, when he was doing some research for the score of [Godfrey Reggio's film] *Powaqqatsi*. We spoke a bit about my time with Ali Akbar Khan and Indian music as well, since that's had a big influence on his own music. When he decided to pick me as his protégée, even though I'd been planning to go on to a PhD program—I was trying to choose between four different programs—I realized this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

Tell us about the process of collaborating with Philip Glass.

The program is about exchanging ideas and experiences. The minimum time we are expected to share is 30 days, but in fact Philip has been very generous and we've spent many more days. Last summer I accompanied him to Tokyo and later to Europe and California. It was so interesting to see Kronos Quartet performing his score to *Dracula* on tour, since a lot of my work has been for film. Of course I use a lot of strings in my scores: sometimes I play for myself and also process the sound electronically, sometimes I ask other musicians to record. For example, the score I wrote for the thriller *Perro Guardián* [a 2014 film directed by Baltazar Caravedo and Daniel Higashionna] is mostly a soundscape made with processed violins. Some of my other scores are just acoustic instrumentation.

After the traveling, from September to December I stayed in New York and we would meet up at Philip's home or studio. Sometimes I'd watch him working on the documentary he's been recently involved with, which is directed by Brett Morgen and is about the early fieldwork of Jane Goodall from the 1960s. It's been especially helpful to follow the procedure Philip has developed for film work.

As for my own projects this year, last December he came to see the premiere at the [experimental arts venue] Kitchen downtown of a new piece I wrote for two speaker dresses, for myself and [flutist and curator] Claire Chase. In March, Claire and I collaborated on another project at the David Nolan Gallery in New York where I played my electric violin and we read a painting by the German artist Jorinde Voigt as a score.

Coming up there will be a concert tribute for Philip Glass at Carnegie Hall on December 8, 2017. That program will include the world premiere of the latest edition of my GAMA project, in which I will also be the soloist on electronics. I have a new string quartet being premiered at the Grand National Theater of Peru in Lima. And there will be premieres of things I've been composing throughout this year of mentoring at the Rolex Gala in February 2018.

What has been most valuable for you in this mentoring program with Glass?

I've learned a lot on so many levels: music, production, and life. Because Philip is such an active composer, constantly taking trips and on tour, it's been valuable to see how he balances all these commitments. All this year he's also added these concerts celebrating his 80th birthday. He is a very magnetic person and knows how to manage his energy, how to be present in each different moment. It has been inspiring to see how he just keeps going

nonstop—especially because sometimes in the creative process we get bogged and stuck, but I'm able to see how he flows.

Another thing I love is watching him work on film scores. His interpretations of the stories are very personal and go so well with the image. I've learned a lot about making choices to be more effective, when to twist the music and how to use just the right dose.

Describe the premiere that will happen at Carnegie Hall in December.

It's called *GAMA XVI* for orchestra and electronics. In early 2012 I started working on GAMA, which is a work-in-progress. I wanted to expand my knowledge and reflect on the relationship between technology and orchestral or solo music. The context was about the phenomenon of expansion and nature. How could I integrate this new instrument I was creating in a very organic way? The speaker dress is an instrument I made as a project during my last semester at Mills College—a self-contained system of many speakers that I use with a contact mic; each speaker delivers a different feedback, and the dress itself becomes like a keyboard of feedback.

I started to do many GAMAs, so this will be the result of all these years of thinking. The visual artist I'm collaborating with in this project is my sister Nomi Sasaki. She's a painter and also does video art, and we have been working together for the past ten years.

I call this an opera because it's not just a concert work but is about the structure of the whole work. There is a concept and a hidden message. I work on the concept first and then, once that is clear and strong for me, I start to get to the music. I'm also interested in the texture of the voice without an actual text (which would make the piece become rational in a way I don't want). I love to create a mood and a soundscape that helps people to become more introspective.

MILESTONES



The **Milton String Quartet** won the grand prize at the 2017 **Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition**. The prize, worth \$10,000, includes an additional \$3,500 for winning the senior string division.



The **Juilliard School** has named the **Argus Quartet** as its graduate resident string quartet for one year, beginning in September 2017.



Bow maker **Benoît Rolland** has been named **Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres**, an award given by the French government, for his work as an archetier.