

Michaela's Music House

Gwendolyn Masin is a celebrated and well-travelled concert violinist and teacher. Gwendolyn has a unique way of teaching violin to young people, weaving stories into her lessons. The parents of Gwendolyn's pupils persistently asked her to share the stories in a format that could be brought home and now everybody is lucky enough to be able to share Gwendolyn's stories with the recent publication of *Michaela's Music House*.

Gwendolyn was inspired by her grandmother to begin learning piano at three years of age. Michaela, in the book, is a four year old, who is determined to learn the violin. However you can begin to enjoy playing the violin at any age.

Gwendolyn kindly agreed to tell us about learning and playing music and what it means to her.



Gwendolyn Masin

When did you start playing the Violin?

I began playing at the age of five. Both my parents are violinists and teachers so it was only natural that I would learn to play the violin. I loved performing, even at a young age. I loved to tell a story with musical notes rather than words. Music was a language to me.

You have lived all over the world. Where did you begin to study?

I was born in Amsterdam. My mother is Hungarian; my father is half Dutch and half Czech. I began lessons on my 5th birthday at a very good school in Amsterdam. A year passed and we moved to Cape Town in South Africa, that's when my mother started teaching me. After three years I started to study with my father. Just before I turned ten we moved to Dublin.

From the age of 12 I started to go abroad to Amsterdam to a famous teacher. I would sometimes go over by myself and I would have three lessons within a weekend. Each lesson could last between four and five hours.



We know you are a soloist but did you ever play in an orchestra?

At the age of 12 I joined the Junior National Youth orchestra. I really enjoyed it. For me it was totally new repertoire. It was great to be part of a team rather than just being a soloist the whole time. The musicians at the time would inspire you to better yourself and become a better player.

When did you start playing as a soloist?

I did my first solo recital in the National Concert Hall when I was 11, the same year I played on *The Late Late Show*. I was also playing with Hungarian orchestras from the age of 14.

What do you enjoy most about being a concert violinist?

I love the independence and the fact that I am responsible for my own work. I love to travel and discover new countries, meeting new people and knowing that each day will be different from the last.

When did you start teaching violin?

I started teaching master classes in the Ark in Dublin when I was 23. I taught a lot during my studies three hours a day, four days a week. It was a mixture of learning by doing. Now I am very busy teaching 10 students. Younger students in particular need regular lessons.

Have you had any bad experiences on stage?

I was onstage playing a concerto. The orchestra stopped for the cadenza. So there I am playing away with no accompaniment and one of my strings breaks. The instrument goes out of tune and I have to stop playing. I didn't know what to do. I explained that I was having technical problems and ran to the dressing room and grabbed a spare string. When I came back I gave them a lesson on how to put a string on the violin!

You have written a book, inspired by your experience of teaching violin. Would you tell us about it?

It is an instructional violin book called *Michaela's Music House*. I've had a lot of children come to my classes. During the lesson they can't take notes. Now they have an illustrated book to take home and use. There are photos of 19 of my students, boys and girls, from Ireland and abroad, aged from three to 11 who are showing different parts of playing the violin. As far as I am concerned anyone can learn the violin.

What age group is the book aimed at?

From the age of three onwards. It's aimed at children and adults who want to learn the violin or who want to learn about music. Anyone beginning violin could learn from this book. If you are already being taught violin this will help you understand some of the basics of playing the violin and reading music. The book helps students help themselves to discover their own musical voice.

Can anyone learn the violin?

Yes. It doesn't matter whether you're from the smallest village in Ireland or living in the biggest city. You can rent or buy a violin very cheaply these days. The book offers new ideas for teachers and solutions for parents who want to support their children in learning music. Alongside real lessons this book is designed to help you get started and to feel confident about what you are doing.

You can buy copies of *Michaela's Music House* from Eason or Opus II in Dublin, Cork and Galway.

