

Interview

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Gwendolyn adds yet another string to her bow

“**A**MBITION is nothing without dedication,” musician Gwendolyn Masin says firmly. Thankfully for her, she has both character attributes in abundance. Violinist, artistic director, producer, teacher and, most recently, author, Masin has many strings to her bow, if you’ll pardon the pun.

She began playing the piano aged three and the violin aged five. Aged 11, she played a recital in the National Concert Hall and later that year appeared on *The Late Late Show*. Since then, she has won countless prizes and awards and has gained degrees with high honours from the Royal Schools of Music in London, the Hochschule der Kunst in Berne and the Musikhochschule in Lubeck, Germany.

Currently, she’s in the home straight of a PhD in Music in Trinity. And even though she’s studying and performing all over the world, she has somehow managed to find the time to publish a book

Violinist Gwendolyn Masin wants to show children that classical music can be fun, she tells Andrea Byrne



too, entitled *Michaela’s Music House* — an endearing and visually-appealing book which teaches children how to play the violin with step-by-step guides and colourful cartoon-like illustrations (which were drawn by Masin’s close friend Colm Mac Athlaoich).

“I wanted to create an educational book about music that was more than just a manual. The book is geared towards people with very little knowledge of music,” she says. “I grew up observing other teachers. I was very conscious of how they were teaching, how they were getting information across to me. I also started teaching very young, which I suppose has helped make this book happen.”

She wrote the “skeleton” of the book when she was 21 but had to put it on hold due to a hectic schedule. “Playing took over, travelling took over and the impressions that go along with both,” she explains.

Masin went back to the book a few years later, taking a six-month break from all other commitments to concentrate on it fully. Blindly, without any experience or any contacts in the industry, she approached a publisher who was instantly impressed by her idea and unique approach.

“I was about 25 at the time, an age when you are still sort of reckless enough to risk it and not consider the consequences. Sure what’s the worst

that would have happened? Nobody would pick it up,” she laughs.

Effervescent, engaging and an enthusiastic talker, 31-year-old Masin has all the hallmarks of a good teacher. It’s not off the trees she gets it though — both her parents had internationally-renowned music careers and now run a music school from their Templeogue home. Motivational in the way she speaks, she’s keen to dispel common perceptions of classical music.

“I want to attract a younger crowd to classical music and to appeal to a broader public. Classical music can be fun. It’s not necessarily about polarising it; it’s not so much that I want somebody to go, ‘I hated it’ or ‘I loved it’ — as long as they weren’t bored, that’s fine.”

Born in Amsterdam to a Hungarian mother and Dutch father, she and her older brother, Patrick, were raised in Cape Town, before coming to



TUNED IN: ‘I want to attract a younger crowd to classical music and to appeal to a broader public. As long as they weren’t bored, that’s fine,’ says Dutch-born musician Gwendolyn Masin

live in Ireland when Gwendolyn was 10. And, while she may refer to Ireland as “home”, with wild, thick, wavy brown hair, naturally olive skin and dark-chocolate eyes she certainly

doesn’t look like she hails from here, nor indeed does she sound like she does. She speaks with a diverse accent: part-Irish, part-Swiss, part-South African.

Asked if she’s currently

attached, Masin smiles, coyly. “It kind of draws into the idea of the entertainer or performer or sportsperson. They seem so busy, do they have a personal life?” she prefaces

before divulging, “I have been in long-term relationships in the past, and to a certain extent they have suffered because I am on the road. Definitely, there are things happening in my life at the moment, but I suppose I am not really in a position or in a place in my head, where I am fully into a relationship.”

That said, Masin is quick to extol the virtues of the nomadic nature life as a performer affords. “I gain an awful lot of strength from it. And there is a certain aspect of being lucky. There are people who spend inordinate amounts of money to experience what I am experiencing”.

Before she departs, I ask enviously where’s next on her itinerary? Nonchalantly, she replies, “Paris.”

Michaela’s Music House is available from Eason in Dublin, Cork and Galway and from Irish branches of Opus 11, RRP €42. www.michaelasmusichouse.com