



Violist Paul Neubauer Debuts with Chicago Symphony Orchestra

APRIL 12, 2018

By Laurence Vittes

Violist **Paul Neubauer** became the youngest principal string player in the [New York Philharmonic](#)'s history at the age of 21. He has been a fixture with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 1989, and a sought-after soloist. New recordings include Aaron Kernis' Viola Concerto with the Royal Northern Sinfonia conducted by Rebecca Miller (Signum), and Ernest Bloch's complete music for viola and piano with Margo Garrett (Delos).

Along with his two children, wife, and sister-in-law Anne-Marie McDermott, Neubauer will premiere Gilad Cohen's *Moonrhymes* on [May 6 on the Parlance Chamber Concerts series](#). Later this year, International Music Company will publish his versions of music originally for cello: Schumann's *Five Pieces in Folk Style* and Mendelssohn's Sonata in D major. When Neubauer's recording of the Schumann with McDermott (Bridge) was released in 2016 *Strings* wrote, "Although only one of the works was composed specifically for viola, Neubauer shows that almost every movement benefits from the adaptation . . . "

In mid-April Neubauer made his Chicago Symphony debut with Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante K. 364; the violinist was Robert Chen, the CSO concertmaster, all under the direction of [conductor Riccardo Muti](#). The *Chicago Tribune* wrote, "Their pinpoint intonation, finely synchronized vibrato, and Neubauer's chocolatey sound were remarkable."

I spoke to Neubauer in the free few days he had before leaving for a tour and live taping in Greece.

What was it like working with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Muti?

It was a great privilege to make my debut with the Chicago Symphony performing the

Sinfonia Concertante with their wonderful concertmaster Robert Chen. I found maestro Muti not only to be a thoughtful and probing artist, but also gracious and delightfully amusing. His approach to K. 364 was very lyrical and devoid of rough attacks. He brought a real chamber music feeling to the piece and encouraged a wide range of dynamics. I don't think I've ever had the feeling that I could play as soft as I wanted until this collaboration. The beautiful playing of Robert and the CSO was backed up by exemplary technical ease.

What were the main interpretive challenges you worked on?

Whenever you study and perform K. 364, one of your main priorities is formulating a unified interpretation of the work with your partner. While there are many solo moments for the violin and viola, the articulations and general flow of each movement need to be decided upon as well as the general stylistic approach. Robert Chen was an ideal collaborator and we easily came to a consensus on how to approach the piece.

How has your approach to K. 364 evolved over the years?

We are constantly evolving as musicians and my approach to all pieces changes from year to year and even from day to day. I would hope that I play K. 364 with a greater sense of Mozart, and of life and music than when I first studied the piece as a teenager. I always perform this work in the scordatura version which I recommend. Mozart wrote the piece in E-flat major, but the viola plays in D major with all the strings tuned one half step higher so it comes out in E-flat. The brighter tuning of the viola makes it more powerful, and the resonance of the instrument brings a beautiful ringing quality to the viola part.

How many times do you think you've played it?

If I had to guess I would say 50 times. I have performed the work with [Joshua Bell](#), Pamela Frank, Vadim Gluzman, Ani Kavafian, Henning Kraggerud, Cho-Liang Lin, Gil Shaham, and Vladimir Spivakov. I also played it with [Glenn Dicterow](#) with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta on a South American tour.

What recording do you suggest for approaching this work?

My personal favorite recording of K. 364 is with violinist Albert Sammons and violist Lionel Tertis, with Hamilton Harty conducting the London Philharmonic from 1933. I'm not suggesting that K. 364 should be performed in the ultra-romantic and free style that is employed in this 1933 recording, but it's a stunning rendition that also includes an amazing, if sacrilegious, substitution for Mozart's own first movement cadenza.

What instrument, bow, and strings did you use for the Mozart?

For the CSO performances I used a viola that belonged to my teacher and godfather, Paul Doktor. It's labeled as a Grancino but it was a viola made into a violin and turned back into a viola . . . it's a long story! I used a Thomas Tubbs bow for the concerts and Larsen A, Spirocore silver D, G, and tungsten C strings.