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by Michael E. Ruhling

Abstract

Violinist Aisslinn Nosky has made a solid mark on the performance of Haydn's works and eighteenth-century music in North America and around the world. She is a founding member of I FURIOSI Baroque Ensemble and the Eybler String Quartet, and has been in Toronto's Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra since 2005. In 2011 Ms. Nosky was named concertmaster of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra, and has performed two Haydn concertos with them, with a third planned for next season. Before the H & H all-Haydn concert January 2015, I interviewed Ms. Nosky about performing Haydn and other music from the eighteenth century, as well as a number of other topics regarding being a violinist and entrepreneur. Her insights into leading an orchestra, playing the Haydn quartets on period instruments, ornamentation, cadenzas, Haydn's repertoire in general, and audience building, are most interesting, and performers in today's world should find her ideas enlightening.

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I. Introduction

Violinist Aisslinn Nosky was named the concertmaster of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra in 2011. She has done remarkable work with them in the music of Haydn, including performing two of Haydn's concertos the past three seasons, with a third planned for next season. I wrote reviews for the HSNA Newsletter of the all-Haydn concerts in 2013 and 2015 that included her playing the concertos, and look forward to hearing the last one in this series. Before she was named concertmaster of H & H, Ms. Nosky had made a solid mark on period performance in North America and around the world. In 2005 she became a member of Toronto's Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, and is a founding member of the I FURIOSI Baroque Ensemble and Eybler String Quartet. Recently released cds of her 2013 performance with the Handel & Haydn Society, and the Eybler String Quartet playing the Op. 33 string quartets, are reviewed in this issue of the *HAYDN* online journal. She has performed in many of the top festivals in North America and Europe, and is in demand all over the world as a soloist, leader, and clinician. A more complete biographical outline and information on Ms. Nosky's performances can be found on her web site: www.aisslinn.com. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Aisslinn to discuss her many thoughtful insights regarding performing Haydn as a soloist, orchestra leader, and chamber musician, just hours before her January concert with the Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra.

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II. General observations regarding playing Haydn's music

MR: What are some basic general observations you have about playing Haydn's music?

AN: Haydn takes more energy than other composers. There's no letting it just happen. It needs to be infused with energy. For example, that last movement of the "Hen" Symphony is exhausting. It's ridiculous. We had a little sectional with the strings, and we had to do it slowly because it's very tricky. I said at one point (regarding the development section), "Let's just notice" because we'd been into all technical things, "how on earth did we get to d major? What happened?" Now we've forgotten because of the technique of this. "How on earth are we here? And how quickly? And then we're right back." And they responded "Yeah, you're right," and once you think about it . . . once you can play all the notes and you add that acknowledgement back in, it becomes fascinating. I then said, "You know, his audience would have recognized this. That's why he did it. And WE need to show it." Outrageous. Even the actual "hen" figure, when he re-orchestrates it and you think you've got the oboe . . . and then the flute comes in. It's almost like the flute saying: "Yeah, well my instrument can actually do that," or "I'm the graceful one." I was lucky enough to play this piece for the first time over the summer at the Staunton Festival in Virginia. It was really hard. I wasn't directing it, so I knew my part very well, but not everyone else's. And I kept cracking up during rehearsals.

MR: You recently recorded the Haydn Op. 33 quartets with the Eybler Quartet. Could you talk a little about your relationship with Haydn's quartets?

AN: My first love, my first relationship, was a string quartet. I was very trained—my brain was really formed—by playing string quartets. I was deeply passionate about what I was doing I had imagined that I would end up being a string quartet player. Fast-forward twenty years later. I never thought in a million years I would have the opportunity to work on Op. 33 *so* carefully and closely. It was a delight. There was stuff

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earlier, and there was stuff later, but I feel like that's the moment when string quartets became, I think, a full genre of their own. I'm blown away even now by them.
MR: You posted a YouTube video of the Eybler Quartet playing the b-minor (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6o1tnZrT60E). You played it very well.

AN: Well thank you. We chose it (for the video) because it's unusual. I've never heard anyone play it like that.

MR: What about your recording of the b minor quartet makes it unusual? Did your approach or preparation make it that way?

AN: My judgment of the b-minor quartet being a little bit different only came in hindsight. I did a lot of research and a lot of listening to Op. 33 before we recorded it. When we were working on it in earnest I wasn't listening to any other interpretations. There was about a year-and-a-half of intensive preparation where my entire experience of the b-minor quartet was through the Eybler Quartet. The four of us were on a journey getting ready for that piece, but there was no discussion of trying to be different. We were led in a certain direction by what we were finding in it, and the more we worked on it the more we discovered that it is different than the rest of Op. 33, especially in its mood. Obviously it's in a minor key, but it's more than that. As we were searching for the right characterization of each movement of each quartet—what for us would work most convincingly—we found a darker direction than in the rest of the quartets in Op. 33. There are moments of contrast, for sure, but overall it is quite dark and moody. It reminded me more of Haydn's dark *Sturm und Drang* symphonies, as compared to the rest of Op. 33 which is pure sunshine and lightness. So it wasn't a decision to not do what anyone else was doing, it's just that the four of us were really in agreement that we liked the direction we were finding. Specifically something that was causing that was the exploration of key arias and sonorities that would come from certain modulations in certain passages. We decided to try to really exploit those moments and go as far as we could in them while still being really convincing; really maximizing the character. If you look at the six quartets as a unit, it makes sense to have contrast among them. And as

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we looked at them, it struck us that there was a different energy in the b-minor than the other five. That's not to say that the other five aren't wonderful, too, but there was something dark.

MR: In considering the different key areas and sonorities, do you think the playing of your specific instruments, or even period instruments in general, added to the darker mood you were discovering?

AN: Our particular instruments are not any different than any other period string quartet instruments, so I don't think it had anything to do with the specific instruments, but rather the key of b-minor. There definitely were some spots where I can remember working slowly through the harmonies that Haydn was using, and it would seem that they were staying in a darker sonority—not as many open strings. Also the last movement has a marking that indicates playing the main melody all on the lower string. So you're not playing on as many open strings as if you were playing the whole melody in first position. And it's a little tricky. One's first instinct might be to play it all in first position using different strings. In an 18th-century performing edition (by Artaria, I think) we found a "slur" marking over the whole main melody on its second and third return. Some modern editors have interpreted that to mean *sul una corda*. (See Figure 1.) At first I wasn't so sure that was the intention, but after much deliberation I decided that it probably was Haydn's intention (score one for modern editors!), and decided to play the melody even at the opening of the movement all on one string. This, along with the low register, creates a very ominous opening to the movement, a dark, closed sound that is less resonant on most violins. Period instruments, especially fortepianos, tend to have different colors in different registers—low, medium, and high. You can have very different tone colors in the very top and the very bottom. With the violin, it was only in the nineteenth century that an instrument was prized for having a consistent tone from the top to the bottom. Personally, that's not an aesthetic that I desire in an instrument, but other people do. And that's fine. It's very beautiful, but it's different. My violin has a different color in the bottom range, and that last movement of the b-minor quartet is in the bottom range of my instrument. In some ways it is a very simple compositional

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choice to start low, but not any composer from that age would have handled it the way Haydn did, and handled it so well. I think that's one of the reasons that movement is so exciting, because it was such an unusual choice. His choice to put that melody in the low register strengthens the overall character. I might have missed that had he (Haydn) put me on the D or A string.

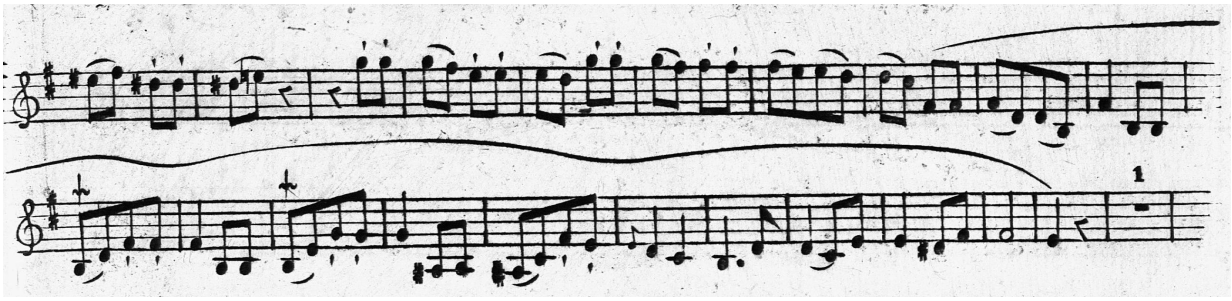

Figure 1: Eighteenth-century performing edition (Artaria) of Haydn String Quartet in B minor, Op. 33 no. 1, iv. Violin 1 sul una corda *indication.*

III. Relationship of quartets and larger works

MR: In some ways the b-minor quartet is orchestral . . .

AN: Yeah. It's difficult, very thick.

MR: It joins the bigger, theatrical style with the chamber style. But the same thing I think occurs in the "Paris" symphonies; they have that theatricality, but also chamber quality to them. I'm interested in your thoughts on this. Your professional presence is very much in chamber music, both Baroque and Classical. How much would you say that passion for string quartets, including Haydn's, which you developed early on, has affected your approach to Haydn's concertos, and as a concertmaster? Is there a connection?

AN: Hmm. Yeah. That's interesting. I guess I've never really thought about a connection of how my training in and continued connection to chamber music has

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affected my approach as an orchestral player. But now that you mention it I think it really has. The orchestras I've chosen to play with, I'm lucky enough to play with, which are, Tafelmusik and H & H, are both organizations that have appealed to me because it feels like we're making chamber music. It feels like the players in them are really invested with personal responsibility in a way that I always connected with chamber music. I didn't always feel that same investment in the larger-scale symphonic orchestras. I really enjoy playing those types of things . . . I take the opportunity I can to play anything. But what makes me most enthusiastic and passionate, motivated to work really hard, is where there is an intimate personal connection among the players, where you can have a conductor but you don't necessarily need one. You can work together and you can execute it yourself. It feels like I'm playing in a quartet when things are going very well in a group like H & H or Tafelmusik. That's what I'm striving for as a concertmaster leading the orchestra.

MR: Do you think Haydn's symphonies and overtures are themselves closer to that quartet ideal than say his contemporaries like Mozart?

AN: I'm not sure it's unique to Haydn so much as it seems more prevalent in eighteenth-century music in general. We're doing Symphony No. 7 *Le Midi* and that strikes me as a large septet or octet, which may have been how it was initially performed. It certainly works with more players on stage. It's extraordinarily beautiful and has original, creative material in it. But when all things are going well, and Mozart symphony can also feel as chamber-like as a Haydn symphony. I'm interested in what you think about it.

MR: Well, in my experience, which is admittedly tainted by bad performances of both Mozart and Haydn symphonies, the what we have labeled "rhetorical" needs of a Haydn symphony necessitate more closely the conductor, as you have said, getting out of the way of the players, maybe bringing things out here and there and serving more as a chamber music coach than a traditional modern stick conductor, works better in Haydn's symphonies than in Mozart's. Again, in my own experience, Mozart's

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symphonies need to be conducted in a way that perhaps is more closely attached to the way one approaches Beethoven or Mendelssohn. But it's those rhetorical moments in Haydn, from the tiniest little motive or longer phrase, stretched to sometimes a whole symphony, and other works, that I think in Haydn's music need to be treated more carefully and delicately, as a chamber musician might.

AN: I agree. I think I'd phrase it differently. Mozart could stand up better to a not-very-great performance. Mozart won't suffer as much if there is a limited awareness of context or rhetorical language amongst the direction and the players. People often ask me "Why is Haydn considered funny?" If they're not players or educated audience members, that can really be something that they miss—the humor in Haydn—as well as many other things. But the humor is what he's famous for. One of my theories is that Haydn is funny because of the way he sets up expectations and then either disappoints or shocks. To perceive, as an audience member, how he is messing with your expectations, is helped by having an awareness of the common language of the eighteenth century, what other composers would have done. That is not necessarily common knowledge in today's concert-going audience. That's neither here nor there; it is what it is. But I see that one of our responsibilities as performers of Haydn's music is to show those conventions, and then how those conventions are broken, at the same time. This is difficult, and can lead to performances of Haydn being just fine, but not very funny. It's not easy, and perhaps I can be accused of exaggeration at times. But I try to show the form, the structure of the piece, for example, at the same time somehow indicating how Haydn is breaking that convention. There are many levels of that. I think one can enjoy a Haydn symphony without knowing all of that stuff, because it's pretty-sounding, but you miss the layers of the onion that you can peel back. With Mozart you can just enjoy the tunes. You can just enjoy the pretty sound, because boy, it's stunning! It's really hard to ruin that. That's not taking anything away from Mozart. I delight in his music. Lots of people speak his language well, I think, and not as many people are able to speak Haydn's language . . . yet. We'll get there.

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MR: What are some practical approaches one can take in order to "show the audience" the conventions of Haydn's music, and the thwarting of them?

AN: One thing I've found success with in working with orchestras, trying to show an audience a convention of form and Haydn's breaking of it, is to actually go over and speak about the form with the orchestra. I work with very, very well-educated performers, no question, and I definitely don't go into these rehearsals thinking I'm going to tell them anything they don't already know about the form. But I do think it can be worthwhile to clarify what we're playing as we play it. Not because we don't know and not because it even necessarily changes how we play it in a way I can particularly put my finger on. But if everybody gets on the same page about the structure as we're going through the structure, it can enrich our own experience. We become our own tour guides through the structure that Haydn has given us. I think one thing that can be lost with familiarity of eighteenth-century music is that we're not always struck by what Haydn has accomplished, by his mastery of form. I think the differences between just playing something and playing it with an awareness of the form can help the form come out in a much more multi-dimensional way from the stage to the audience. This can be very subtle. Again, I never assume that someone I'm playing with doesn't already know the structure, but they may not be focused on the same aspects that I'm focusing on when we're playing it. Something changes when twenty-five or thirty people are focused on the same aspects of a structure of a classical symphony. One obvious example could be: "Listen everyone; we know this is where the recapitulation *should* be. Let's make sure we understand that when we're playing it. I know that you know this is a surprise chord, one of Haydn's most obvious, most used tricks. But why does it always work?" So I try to clarify in rehearsal why *I'm* responding to Haydn's joke. And what often happens in rehearsal is the other players think "Oh, yeah. I knew that was the case, but it has been pointed out to me again, and now I'm going to point it out to the audience." I think that step is often missing.

Another thing is contextualizing for the orchestra these remarkable things Haydn does. If you only play Haydn you don't always remember what other composers, who weren't

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as skillful as Haydn in crafting these forms, might have done. There were a lot of people in the eighteenth century who were composing beautiful music, but who didn't have that ability to manipulate the form like Haydn did. One thing that has helped me play Haydn better is playing music by these other composers. This has shown me quite clearly what is remarkable about Haydn. So I never go in to lecture an orchestra about Haydn, because they already know about him. But putting Haydn in the context of other composers gives me a particular perspective, and draws attention to certain aspects of Haydn for me at that moment. Then when I convey these aspects to the orchestra, all of us draw attention to those aspects for the audience. The audience may not be able to say exactly what it is that is clarified, but, for example, when there is a surprising chord and we—the orchestra—play that chord with the *intention* of surprising the audience, it adds an extra vibrancy to it.

IV. Making Haydn's music "speak:" humor, rhetoric, articulation

MR: Indeed humor, in subtle and in more obvious ways, has long been part of the discussion of Haydn's music. I don't know if you use or like the term "rhetorical" regarding your playing, but what are your thoughts on that term and idea?

AN: That's really interesting that you ask that. When I started to work on the Op. 33 quartets, to really study them, I wanted to delve into getting an understanding of what everyone was talking about when they refer to "Rhetoric in Haydn." I became alternately infuriated by and fascinated by the concept. I don't hate the term, but I think that it's meaning is a little vague unless you're a Haydn scholar, or Haydn performer, or both. I know what you mean. But when I speak to people who maybe haven't read as much on the subject I try to qualify it. For example, I start out by where they're coming from, saying rhetorical gesture in Haydn is how it is very conversational, or how he will take a very small number of notes and make something extraordinary out of them. I don't hate the term, but I think it has become too popular in terms of Haydn, and therefore it doesn't mean anything any more.

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MR: When you play, and some other people play, I can hear that conversation idea influencing you. I especially notice it when, as some say, you make the vehicle of expression your right (bow) hand rather than your left hand. Such things like careful use of vibrato, and different ways of using the bow, bring out this rhetorical conversational attachment. One often hears this in chamber music, but less often in orchestral works. Do you have any practical advice for orchestra leaders on how one can get their orchestra to develop such subtle "chamber" aspects when playing eighteenth-century orchestral music?

AN: I find myself talking a lot in rehearsals with orchestras about what kinds of articulations we intend to use in many different aspects of performing together. The bow is the vehicle of expression at my disposal that is most variable. If you read the eighteenth-century treatises they talk about different kinds of articulations you can achieve with the bow. They certainly talk about articulation in the vocal treatises—different kinds of consonances, etc. I can't think of any (string) treatise that doesn't address at least a little bit how you start the sound with the bow, and how you end the note with the bow, and that there are many ways you can do that. To me there are limitless ways to begin the tone of a note with the right hand. That variance, that gradation, of the types of articulation with the right hand can tend to get lost in the shuffle of later Romantic music for many reasons, but one that comes to mind is that the middle of the note—the beautiful sustaining of the sound in vocal-style line but without words—became the focus. There's nothing wrong with that. But in dealing with eighteenth-century music I believe it's more important to pay attention to all the parts of the tone: how you begin a tone, how you sustain a tone, and how you end a tone. And so I'm totally obsessed with my right hand in terms of expression. In rehearsals with an orchestra I'll often compare the beginning of a bow stroke to a consonant. I'll say we can have a gentle consonant like a "buh" or a "luh," or we can have a "tuh"—a t or a k consonant—and these are all possible. We're not literally saying k but I sure am trying to make that effect. This becomes particularly noticeable and clear when we're playing

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colla parte with a chorus. If we're doubling exactly what the choir is doing I don't want to take anything away from their text. I want the audience to hear those words so with my bow I try to play those words. I can't literally create text with my bow, but I can get pretty close. There are extreme differences in beginning a note, such as starting with a very hard attack, what I would call a k or a t, to starting with a very soft attack, an m or an l. The experience of how someone interprets my bowing as a t or a k is going to be subjective. But at least having the conversation with the orchestra players on how I'm going to begin the bow stroke in terms of consonant sounds, along with a little demonstration from me, goes a long way in getting people to think more about it. This gets back to the idea of a conversation. If it were a true conversation, we would be using words. Attaching articulation to words helps to clarify the great variety of articulation possibilities.

MR: And do you have the same kind of approach to ending the note?

AN: Absolutely. There are many ways words end. Is it "take" or "tame?" The way that you take the bow off the string makes these differences. You can take it off quickly, or you can take it off slowly. You can *not* take it off. All of these create a different ending sound. If you are playing on your own, there might be things that you do just as a matter of course, but if you are playing the same line with a section of people, it can be really important to get everybody to play with the same articulation of the bow, including the beginning and ending of the tone, because it will make the music more bright, more three-dimensional, you will add meaning. I'm striving to say words with my bow, even though I can't.

MR: This is all very interesting. The people you play with in these orchestras certainly know all about articulation, and with the idea that eighteenth-century instrumental music is conversational or rhetorical. And yet for so many people, players and connoisseurs, I think this is really a vague notion. So to actually suggest specific words to help demonstrate or clarify an articulation—the beginning, middle, and end of a tone—perhaps establishes a closer connection to this conversational/rhetorical nature of

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eighteenth-century music for the performers, which can then be conveyed to the audience.

AN: Yes. Even just the process of discussing these ideas, these thoughts, adds to our music performance. It's a worthwhile exercise. It is interesting to me that there was so much discussion in eighteenth-century treatises on how to start and end notes, and how it really just disappeared. I trained as a musician for many, many years before I really heard a discussion about articulations, as though there was more than one: "I'm either going to 'articulate' or not. Do you mean there can be different kinds?" After finally discovering this, I found that I was only limited by what I could imagine I could do. Music becomes much more like spoken language, with so many more possibilities, when you discover the variety of articulation that you have available to you. It's fun! It can be overwhelming at times, but it's a good thing. I'm out of my element with winds, but some wind-player friends of mine have told me about treatises that tell you to use different sounds inside your mouth, to articulate different consonances to get certain types of tonguing. This is very interesting to me, because when the sound comes out, I don't hear a t, but they might be saying t to get a particular sound.

MR: And the same is true for the beginning, middle, and end of a sound, as you have identified with the bow stroke. There are different things wind players can do, different shapes one can make with the oral cavity, tongue, etc., to change these various parts of the sound, as you can with the bow. But winds players have the advantage of a closer physical relationship to language.

AN: Sure. And with many modern string players, the intention of one note is to get to the next note. And this can create a certain kind of sound, or style, which can be stunningly beautiful. I don't hear as much conversation in that arena about the ends of notes. But I think the eighteenth-century style is more satisfying when one considers more carefully all parts of the sound of each individual note, as one might treat words.

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V. Matters of embellishment 1: cadenzas.

MR: what is your approach to writing cadenzas? Do you refer to treatises? What are your raw materials?

AN: I do play my own cadenzas. And it's not that I don't consult any historical documents or treatises. But for Haydn's violin concertos I take as a basic structure whatever cadenzas I can find that have survived from the time rather than just treatises and words. A lot of them are by Mozart. From my perspective, Mozart's cadenzas, while totally exquisitely beautiful, are in most cases more elaborate than is necessary for these particular concertos. I feel that Haydn's violin concertos, probably because they are from somewhat early on in his career, are somewhere in between a Baroque concerto and a Classical concerto. Technically they are "Classical," but there are a lot of elements of Baroque ritornello-form writing in them, so to me they resemble Bach just as much as they resemble Mozart; they are somewhere in between. So I looked at Mozart's cadenzas to get some ideas. But I thought most of them are too elaborate, simply because Mozart's tend to visit more key areas than Haydn visits in his writing at the time of the concertos. I take the length of each movement, and try to do something that would heighten the audience's excitement without being so long that they lose the thread of the overall movement. Even thought the first movement of the Haydn C major concerto could possibly have a longer cadenza than I'm playing [in the Handel & Haydn Society concert], the shortness of the final tutti section made me not want to make the cadenza very long. So there are many factors in determining the length.

Knowing, then, that these concertos, particularly the C major, were almost certainly written for Luigi Tomasini, I found some published music by Tomasini, who himself was a composer and apparently quite esteemed by Haydn for his compositions, in order to get ideas of what kinds of things he did on the violin. Of particular interest to me were his violin duos—the duo concertante—which are dedicated to Haydn. They are really difficult, really technically hard. I looked at what kinds of technical things Tomasini did, because when Tomasini would have played it, he would have been using his own toolbox

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of technical things he liked to do in his cadenzas. In looking at these pieces, I get the sense that he liked to play really high, and I think he liked to play beautiful melodies, and actually I don't believe he had any flaws in his technique based on the materials he composed. Wow. So I thought why don't I try to do things, some technical tricks, that I like to do on the violin, and also that I try to cover a few bases that Tomasini might have done. So there are some really high things in my cadenza, some low things, and then I found it was hard for me to keep some things out of the cadenza; it kept getting longer and longer. You may have guessed by how I'm describing this that I'm not going to try to improvise the cadenza in this instance, because we're making a recording of these concerts. I didn't feel that would be a great use of time, even though I absolutely love to hear people improvise cadenzas. Some other time I would be really keen to do that, but I didn't want to risk having the recording turn out just how we want it. So I am carefully planning out the cadenza this time. I have no doubt that Tomasini just "did it." I look forward to exploring that more. I love it when people do that. It's not easy. In this case, I feel that the nature of a cadenza when you're making it up is not necessarily conducive to being saved for ever and ever in a recording. It's a different thing—not better or worse, just different. But for this concert, which is recorded, I tried to make it not too long, and to touch on a few major musical ideas, small motives, avoid going into any key areas Haydn didn't go into, and then try to make it exciting at the end. It's a little bit formulaic structurally speaking, but within that structure it's very free.

MR: Is there a particular shape to your cadenzas that you can describe?

AN: A narrative shape? Hmm. I don't necessarily have any historical basis for shape. In the Mozart piano concerto cadenzas I've studied, which are filled with beautiful material (he blows everyone else out of the water in beautiful material), he doesn't seem to stick to a specific form. They seem to be more often a response to what has gone on in the movement. For me, personally, not necessarily based on any specific historical description, for the cadenza of the first movement of the C major I start with a strong, very positive emotional gesture, and then as a contrast to that do something either sad, or sweet, and then try to build slowly to a climax, which is the orchestral tutti. So there

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is somewhat of a narrative arc. Within this narrative arc, then, I tried to find the motives from the movement that fit—what motive might suit minor sadness, etc. Again, this wasn't based on any specific historical thing, but it seemed natural to me and was a way to "inhabit the space" and do something nice, and then go on. I know if I was to perform a longer cadenza, say to something like Mozart or other later classical works, I would have more of those narrative arcs. But I wouldn't, for example, go big and bombastic at the beginning, then big fancy stuff, and then a slow bit at the end. That doesn't build momentum. The second movement (of the Haydn C Major Concerto), which I think is one of my favorite things in the world of concerto repertoire, is a little canzona, a little song. I really wanted to have myself not modulate in the two little cadenzas (near the beginning and at the end). I wanted to take the literal idea of "candeza" being a "cadence." I think it's a song, and I was giving the orchestra during rehearsal the image of the tenor accompanying himself on the mandolin. Very casually, though, singing up to a balcony. Maybe some gender-bending going on. We hear him sing this song everybody says, "Oh yeah, that's why we hired that guy." Anyway, back to the idea of taking the cadenza as "cadence," I tried to think about what I could be singing in one breath. Really Baroque, at the end of the long da capo aria, and I'm nearly at the end. I imagined Tomasini showing up on the scene and charming everyone to death with his unbelievable "Italian-ness," so charming and vocal. He had to have had a vocal style of playing, to be able to "sing" on the violin, if this movement was written for him. So I'm trying to make my cadenza at the end of this movement seem like one embellished, one-breath phrase. It's a little long, but I'm not going very far afield. It wouldn't be appropriate for other types of movements, but this one is very special. It seems that instinct led me there, and maybe I'm totally wrong about it, but who knows. But it's a little song; it's very sweet.

MR: Can you think back to when you did the G major concerto two years ago? Was it a similar process?

AN: The G major was the same thought process. I went in a little different direction, though. If anything, I think the G-major cadenza might be the same length as the one

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I'm doing now for the C-major, even though the G-major movement is shorter over all. But the reason the length felt right then is that, compared to the C major, the final orchestral tutti is rather generous for the orchestra. The C-major ending isn't perfunctory exactly, it's just very compact. I actually thought I would have a longer cadenza for the C major than for the G major. But when I was forming the cadenza, it seemed weird to have played and played and played in the cadenza, and then have it followed by this little orchestral ending. Again, not necessarily an academic choice, but a sense of what seemed right. In the slow movement of the G major, the cadenza is longer than in the C major—I went to the minor and then did some other things. But the G major slow movement isn't a song with a plucking accompaniment like the C major. The soloist is much more involved with the orchestra. It's beautiful in its own way. It's very Baroque to me, something like Bach. Very conversational, whereas there's no conversation in the C major slow movement.

VI. Matters of embellishment 2: orchestral tuttis and repeats.

MR: You do a fine job of embellishing tuttis. This also gets into the question of varied repeats. At times in the G major concerto which you recorded with Handel & Haydn, I noticed you did a few little embellishments in the first playing of the exposition, particularly with repeated motivic ideas, which you then play straight in restatements. This still gives different playings in the repeats. I also noticed in your live performance of the Concerto in G and *Le Matin* two years ago, and in the rehearsal today of the Concerto in C, that you create what I would call a bit of rhythmic "tug" here and there between you as soloist and the orchestra, that, for me, adds to the tension and excitement of these pieces, which is released at just the right moments. Do you plan all of this out or does it come to you as you're playing? Could you describe that process?

AN: I do think about them. I don't always plan them specifically, but I do think about what I can do with these types of things, and them let them come out in the performances. Thinking back to the G major concerto we played two years ago, it wasn't

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necessarily planned ahead of time, though I'm definitely aware that I do it. Maybe I planned where I embellished, but I didn't plan where I *didn't* embellish. But it ended up working out okay. You mentioned the embellishments and you mentioned the time I would take. Sort of pulling or pushing against the orchestra just a tiny little bit. I never think about it as time, although I agree with you that that is what ends up happening. In my mind, I'm reaching out and trying to nudge people onstage. It's because I feel really trusting of these particular players. If I'm messing with something they have to respond to it, or the music can break. It's not the end of the world if it does, but a downbeat, for example, might not be together if I push too hard. This is definitely a parallel with quartet playing, where you've got three other people. With an orchestra like H & H, of that caliber, I know they have my back. I'm not doing it at musically inappropriate places, but if there is a place in the music where I feel like it can happen, I'll do it. This is often the second or third time I play something, or a situation where Haydn might be writing out something a bit slower to manipulate the tempo—changing note values—I might push it a little further. It's a way of reaching out and saying "are you there" without having it snap. I'm glad you think it is something that works out okay, because I wouldn't want to push it too far. The "bigger beats" should be falling in the proper places, with a little tug within those.

MR: I think you put it well when you said that you trust these players. You trusted them to know when the freedom can take place, and when the "big beats" need to be together. I noticed this particularly in your communication with principal cellist Guy Fishman during the live performance of the G major. The two of you led the rest of the orchestra through these moments very well. The tension created made the music special. Perhaps this wouldn't have the same effect listening to a recording, as seeing and hearing it happen live. Certainly a testament to the value of live performance.

AN: Well thank you. I was extremely moved by the first performance of the G major concerto two years ago, which is probably the one you attended. But as we were making a live recording I had to listen to it the next day. And as a recording, it was a little bit messy. It was very, very challenging for me to accept that, but I did. It was hard on the

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later performance. It was all my fault, the messiness. It was messier than I perceived at the time. In hindsight, who cares? It doesn't matter. The experience was electric in the moment. And so there's no question in my mind that the experience of listening to the recording of the performance has colored the way I am approaching the performance of the C major now. I'm feeling, to be perfectly honest, a bit more cautions. But I cannot play cautiously; it's not in me. The orchestra knows that there will be something ridiculous in the live performance of the C major. There are a couple of other things that are affecting my approach to the C major. For one thing the C major is a little bit more dense. Although that sounds a little simplistic there are more notes for the solo and the accompaniment, particularly on the eighth-note pulse, and with the dotted figures. This means I can take more time than before, and be more daring. I don't direct all of the time, or as much as I want. I'm still learning. It has not been that long that I've had the opportunity to do this. The biggest challenge I find is being able to focus on everything I need to focus on. So during rehearsals I find myself more cautious in my playing because I'm focused on what they are doing. The dress rehearsal is the last chance I have to ask the orchestra to do what I'd like them to do. During the performance I can focus more on my own playing, which may or may not be more cautious. We'll see. It may be that it comes out a little bit more cautions. C major . . . gotta worry about our E strings . . . we'll see. It's not that I'm giving in or compromising. Two years ago it was a little upsetting to me hearing the recording of the first performance being a little messy, but I didn't want to compromise by being too cautious just to get a super recording. We had a little rehearsal, and had the chance to go over some things that didn't work. And in the end we came up with something that was also good. I just wasn't free to do whatever I wanted, which is fair . . . it's a different thing. But during the live performance it's worth it . . . I would never want to give up any of that electricity, that feeling, because the people in the room deserve that great experience as much as someone who might like to get a really great recording. We'll get both. But in the live performance I'll "go for it," and then if we have to change something for the later performance, to get a good recording, we'll do it.

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MR: What about embellishing tuttis and varying repeated passages? Could you say more about how you approach such improvisatory things in orchestral playing, as a soloist, and in quartet playing?

AN: In orchestral playing, if I'm not a soloist, I do not add ornaments. I can't prove or disprove what people would have done at the time, but in Classical repertoire, in my opinion, it doesn't add something for one person to ornament in an orchestral tutti. People probably did in the eighteenth century, but I'm not sure every composer would have loved that. Contemporary reports of Italian Baroque orchestras are almost comical in the ways they describe melees of people ornamenting on the same part. But Baroque music is one thing; maybe there's more space for it there. But if I'm not a soloist, I don't tend to add anything in orchestral music. I wish I could get in a time machine and go back to hear what they were doing. You might know more contemporary accounts that suggest leaders might have been ornamenting.

MR: Salomon, for example, probably did some ornamenting, and Haydn wrote some things for him to do in the symphonies. It seems particularly on repeats that some things might have been added by violin leaders.

AN: I'm sure that's true and it would have been incredible to hear. But there's not a lot of room in much of this repertoire for adding anything. Haydn wrote a lot of his ornaments into his orchestral music. Maybe I'm too conditioned as an orchestral player by music after the eighteenth century. I'm sure there are situations were it would work, but as a general rule I don't add anything. I would if I was asked to by someone who had a vision, but I don't feel like I've been missing anything by not adding ornaments. I wonder how I'd feel playing orchestral music of composers other than Haydn. To me Haydn writes the ornaments into his symphonies for us, particularly in the more lyrical slow movements. I've played a few symphonies by other composers, and there might be space in those composers for adding ornaments. Perhaps it is a question of the composer rather than a broader stylistic consideration. In any case, I always make decisions about what to add according to the composer rather than by date. Taking into

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account the intentions of the composer, as much as we can know them, and the people who may have been playing for him . . . these kinds of things.

Having said that, when I'm playing a solo piece I do think that I should add ornaments. I try to be judicious about them, putting them where they might add to the music rather than detract from the audience's overall experience. I don't want to make things so complicated that the basic structure of the music is obscured. Somebody recently asked me whether or not there should be added ornamentation in Haydn's string quartets. In this case it was a late work, I think Op. 77. I don't have evidence that can make me say, "Absolutely not. It's against the rules." I don't have a letter from Haydn that says: "Do not ornament, or you're wrong!" So I didn't say to this person, "No, you'd be wrong." But if you're asking yourself whether or not this ornament should be here, maybe it shouldn't be. It's like those expensive stores where you go in and there are no price tags on anything. If you have to ask if you can afford it, you can't. I think that about ornaments in Haydn; if I have to ask myself "Should this be here?" then I really should consider that perhaps it shouldn't. I'm not against ornamenting—in Italian Baroque music I'll "go for it" with the best of them. But I want to make sure I'm adding to and not obscuring the underlying form. When I play the violin concertos of Haydn there are, to me, a few spaces where ornaments could be added to tuttis that could add some charm, add some interest, because the material is repeated more than once in a movement, and there is sonic space for them that allows them to be added without obscuring the overall form or changing the musical mood so much that they get in the way. That's a personal choice for me. I know that someone may absolutely disagree with that. But I do add ornaments to the tutti passages as a soloist. Not a lot, but every once in a while. And I may be wrong. It may be against his intention. We don't know for sure. In the end I may have a lot to answer for.

MR: What about repeats? How do you approach changes to repeated passages?

AN: While the Eybler Quartet was recording the Op. 33 quartets, we had a lot of discussions about whether or not to take repeats. It seems to me a lot of recordings do

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all of the repeats indicated in the music. I think that is absolutely one legitimate way to go about it. We weren't sure whether or not we wanted to do all of them. We like playing the quartets, so the idea of extending them by taking all of the repeats was certainly appealing. When we went into the intense preparation for the recording I think we all thought that we would most likely do all of the repeats indicated, because it gives us more chance to play this beautiful music. And after all, clearly Haydn put them in there. But then as we explored the pieces we began to ask why they were there. We didn't arrive at a definitive answer, but we did start to discuss the fact that it was a convention of the time to put a repeat at the end of almost any movement, and any section. Not every section does, but the vast majority of them have a repeat. I started to wonder: "Are they there because Haydn absolutely counted on you repeating them or are they there as an option?" I think if you consider that Op. 33 was written to be played by gifted amateurs, and not necessarily written to be performed in public, it makes a lot of sense that if you're an amateur and you've just gotten your subscription of music in the mail and are really excited to play it, it is nice to be given the option to repeat things. The second time through you know you're going to play it better. We decided to take a case-by-case approach, that for each instance we would decide whether, for us, the repeat would add extra musical meaning to the experience. There were different answers. What it usually came down to was what compositional technique Haydn was using at the end. For example in first movements, if he used a trick at the end where he created a surprise, such as an extra rest, or return to an earlier theme as coda material, and this was really surprising the first time but might not be as surprising the second time around, we decided not to do the repeat. We didn't think the compositional technique got any stronger by repeating it. This is true in a couple of movements. It's not that we thought doing the repeat was wrong, but we thought that we could make it more of a surprise by doing a really big "thing" the first time through and letting it speak for itself. But it's an option. Eventually he stopped putting in those repeats in as many places. That makes me wonder if it was a type of convention: "Repeat, but only if you want to." Most of the time we wanted to, but every once in a while we wanted to have a really big impact and then just end. We ended up doing all of the exposition repeats, but a couple of the development repeats we didn't do.

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MR: What about minuet-trio movements?

AN: We decided to do the da capo repeats. Again, I don't have any evidence as to whether or not they were taken. But the minuets in Op. 33 are so short, and we never got tired of the material. They are so inventive that we almost couldn't stop ourselves from doing them. But in later Haydn that we've played we've decided not to do the repeats in the da capos. I think they're there if you want to, but we chose not to.

MR: Do you make any alterations during these repeats in the minuet movements? Even with tempo, or dynamics, or articulations?

AN: I absolutely find myself doing things differently. I almost can't stop myself from doing things differently. Sometimes it might be, I suspect, a very subtle difference to the listener. We're playing it a second time with the knowledge that we've played it once already, and it's never the first time except for the first time, so subtle differences will occur. In some movements we make different dynamic plans, as contrast. It seems that in the minuet movements where the little melodic fragments he builds the material around are very simple, and the audience can keep them in their heads quite quickly, some of the charm of the movement can come in the quartet's conversation—how they are passing the material back-and-forth. I think the minuets are some of the most conversational parts of these pieces. It's unnatural to say something over and over in conversation without different inflection, just as it's unnatural to say something twice the same way on a violin . . . on a VIOLIN. So it's hard to stop myself from doing things differently on repeats. It can be subtle or it can be outrageous. The "Joke" minuet is really outrageous the way we play it; we take great liberty with it, especially where he indicates—to me—the sliding in the first violin part. I would accept criticism that we go too far . . . that's okay. I would accept that as totally legitimate criticism . . . and do it anyway.

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VII. Studying manuscripts and other sources.

MR: The question of the marking in the "Joke" quartet, and your earlier comments about the indication of *sul una corda* in the b-minor quartet leads me to the topic of studying manuscript and early printed sources. I know that when you were preparing for the Haydn pieces you performed with H & H, you wanted to see autographs and other early sources. Why do you look at the manuscripts? What kinds of things do you glean from studying these that impact your playing?

AN: When a manuscript is available, if I can possibly get my hands on it, I will look at it. With Op. 33 unfortunately nothing survives but some first editions, and even those are worth looking at. I personally feel, and my quartet agrees with this, that I want to get as close to the original source as possible, and look at as many early sources as possible. I absolutely respect the work of an editor in preparing an edition to be printed and sold. It's very necessary for editors to take material that can even just be hard to see, and to make it more able to be parsed by more people. I like to do that work for myself. I want to go through the material myself and come to my own conclusions, even if those are the same conclusions an editor may have come to. It adds more layers of connection between me and the music, and potentially more layers of meaning. I've only ever learned things with the violin that I've been able to figure out myself. I've had some of the most incredible teachers in the world, and they've told me all of these wonderful things that I never really got around to until I made a decision to do it for myself.

Even though I absolutely think things need to be beautifully prepared for print editions, I really want to do the editing myself. I want to know I haven't missed anything. It's amazing how people can interpret visual cues differently. In Haydn . . . I think it's one of the Op. 50 quartets . . . there is a fragment that survives in manuscript. In it there is a part where Haydn had used shorthand, in I think the second violin part, indicating the violin should play a bunch of sextuplets. He had written a bunch of dots under a slur. The modern edition I had at the time (I was still in school) was telling me to play a certain bow stroke—bow vibrato—and it was weird. At some point somebody showed

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me the manuscript and I thought, "That's not what Haydn's going for at all. Haydn's telling the second violinist to play sextuplets, and he's saving his hand from writing them all in." I can't remember what bowing I finally used, but some editor had come to a completely different conclusion than I did looking at it. It's not often that black-and-white. In that instance I realized Haydn was only trying to keep his hand from cramping, and someone else took it to be some musical idea. Things like that can be missed. Was it Hummel that changed a bunch of notes in Op. 33? He "improved" a few "mistakes," reassigning some voices and flipping the counterpoint. It's just subtle. But you just never know what is going to slip by. So I like to do that legwork as well as the end part. I understand why a composer might not want the public to see his manuscript. I would hope they would think I was trustworthy. I won't spread it around that Haydn was saving his hand. But I also think that it's important to understand that the conventions of writing things down were different in the eighteenth century. Each composer had a different notational style.

MR: We could also point out that he had a trusted copyist, and the little shorthand things would have been understood by the copyist, but not necessarily by modern editors.

AN: Yes. And Haydn remarks on the poor quality of copyists to his publishers later, when he felt he was losing control over certain things. So it's important for me as a performer to know what I am looking at. "Who wrote this? Was it Haydn?" Even Haydn could make mistakes. I think just to know what I'm looking at makes a big difference. Actually, a little off topic, I'm fascinated by what would have been going on in copy houses of the time. I'm nerdy, but I think it would make a great movie. These were string quartets that we wanted to get out there and sell. There was money on the line. Who were these publishing houses hiring to make the engravings? Not so much in Haydn, but I swear there are string quartets where I come across some things and I think of the engraver: "You didn't know how to read music." Did they just hire whoever? I'm sure someone's done research on this. But I can image these backroom deals just to get string quartets out, steal them, etc. Who were these people? It must have been really

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hard work, maybe involving chemicals floating around that made you crazy. Somebody somewhere sweated this out.

VIII. Programming and audience-building.

MR: I've enjoyed reading about your interesting and sometimes off-the-wall programming ideas, particularly with your Baroque group I FURIOSI. Your I FURIOSI web site states that your programming is "inspired by the practice of the Baroque era while invoking the 'bizarre and unnatural' aesthetic both cherished and despised in its time." And you have mentioned the need to educate audiences and bring younger people to this music. Being honest, do you get the sense that more people are coming to these concerts billed and programmed along less traditional lines, and that they'll stay?

AN: I think it is important to consider this type of question. The idea of audience development is extremely close to my heart. I was asked this by a non-musician journalist earlier today, who asked "why do you play this music? Why do you do this?" I said I genuinely feel that playing this music is a privilege, and the price of that privilege is that I have the responsibility to bring it to as many people as I can. That doesn't mean I'm always going to be able to open up a brand new audience to it, but I need to try. So in terms of what has happened with I FURIOSI, all I know is our audience, and I don't know what the audience would like if we didn't do what we do, look how we look, program how we program. I FURIOSI has been playing in the Toronto area and doing tours for almost seventeen years now, and what I can say is that we've built up a hugely loyal following in Toronto, and some fans all over the world who keep up with us on the internet. The audience is not just young. Our demographic is a huge age range. One of our biggest fans who has just passed on once said "You've got the 'blue-hairs' of all ages—the 'blue-hair' teenagers, and the 'blue-hairs' like me." She was fantastic. I think the group has a wide appeal, so we've tried ways to try to connect with people who might not normally go to classical music concerts. Very frequently, even last month, someone would say to me, "I came to your concert because my friend dragged me, and your

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picture looked cool. I had no idea what to expect. I mostly expected to be totally bored. But I loved it, and I'll be coming back" or "I didn't expect to love it but I did." I hear this a lot. Sometimes the hardest part is getting them into the door. They may not become lifelong fans, but the music, the art, can speak for itself if we can only show people that the experience isn't as scary as perhaps it might seem. I actually adore the traditional concert experience as well. Let's say the nineteenth-century experience of going to a hall, maybe Symphony Hall, dressed in white tie and tails, of a certain class. I would have loved to have gone to one of those! I'm not saying we should do away with that experience. Where I've tried to connect with new people is by presenting the music in close to the same way it might have been first presented—that is not changing the music in order to accommodate the audience—but try to show people through demonstrations, through talking to them, even one-on-one asking them to come, to convince them to give it a shot, make them willing to give it a try. No one has ever said to me "I got dragged to it and it wasn't worth anything." They may say, "It was strange to hear someone singing to me in a different language. I don't know about that." But they've never said, "Why are you doing this?" It can represent itself if we can only get them in the door. Not everybody is in a position to be a patron of the arts. I get that. But everybody is in a position to need art, not just music, in their lives. We have such complicated lives, that this is a lifeline. Creative experience of any kind is a lifeline, part of a mental health process. I lie awake in bed at night trying to think of ways of getting people to concerts. There is no easy way. Maybe tonight is the night I'll think of it; when I'm supposed to be practicing or resting. Ultimately there's no one way to do that. But at least I can say to people, "I see why you might be intimidated by a classical music concert, but would you give this one a try and let me know what you think? Don't be intimidated. Nobody knows as much more about it as you think they do. If you're scared about clapping, just wait until the person next to you starts, and don't worry about it. Or don't clap at all. That would be very 'eighteenth-century.' Hiss and whistle, and throw cabbages at the stage." IFURIOSI is a labor of love, and we have a very devoted following.

MR: Do you think the character of I FURIOSI, with that little edge to it, is more conducive to Baroque music than it is to, say, Classical or some other repertoire?

Ruhling, Michael E. "Performing Haydn: An Interview with Violinist Aisslinn Nosky."
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AN: I think in a sense it is, because, while it is perhaps over-generalizing to say, the Baroque tends to have that edginess, the bizarre, the irregularity, the kookiness, the operas where no one is who they think they are and the gods fly down to save everybody in the end. Also, the form of the music tends to be shorter, with smaller little movements. I think this all can lend itself more easily to an edgy approach. But even later eighteenth-century Classical music can be presented in different ways. H & H has a loyal younger following as well. I think it's okay if the classical music crowd is an older crowd. Over the history of Western art music it has always been the demographics of those who have had more time in their lives that devote themselves to listening to music and to giving it patronage. I think that's normal. Once someone is established, and the kids aren't tiny anymore, they can go out to enjoy a concert. It doesn't mean we shouldn't be concerned about getting younger people to come; we should. But I don't feel a sense of panic or emergency, because the music is just too great for that. Our institutions that present the music may be changing, but that's natural. That may be difficult, but necessary. And calling attention to it creates a crisis, which generates attention. Let's take the attention. I think it would be a mistake not to try to engage younger people, because I think the more contact you have with any art form the more enjoyment you're potentially going to get out of it. We can't blind ourselves to the issue. But the music is not going to go away.