



GETTING PERSONAL

# An Inside Look at 3 Canadian New York

by The Violin Channel / May 27, 2022 / 11 MIN READ

Lara St. John, Aisslinn Nosky, and Adrienne Lloyd have made New York City their home

The Violin Channel recently caught up with Lara St. John, Aisslinn Nosky, and Adrienne Lloyd. We were curious to know how their time away from Canada and New York City has affected their careers and lives.



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## **Violin Channel: All three of you are Canadian musicians living in New York City. Can you describe why you made the decision to live here, and what about New York City that makes you call it home?**

**Adrienne Lloyd:** Since the very first time I visited New York, I've loved it. It sounds like a romantic exaggeration or something, but I honestly think it is the cultural capital of the world. It's actually hard for me to imagine the opportunities for musicians of all genres existing anywhere else.

**Lara St John:** I always knew, even as a child, that all roads lead to New York. I grew up close by in Philadelphia for a few difficult years in the 80s yet I always felt like I was in a city of cities. I had to leave the general area for a few years when I went to the UK (London, England) and then came back at 20. Nothing else made sense and I've had my home base here ever since!

**Aisslinn Nosky:** I was born in the town of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island on the west coast of Canada. I think, because of that, I have always been fascinated by New York City. Sometimes I joke, I've spent my life migrating towards the Island of Manhattan, my first island off the coast of Canada. I went to school in Toronto and got my first orchestral jobs there (first with the Canadian Opera Company and then with Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra). For over twenty years I lived in Toronto and had many wonderful experiences there. During those years I had many opportunities to visit New York City and eventually I started to feel a pull towards New York to pursue further professional opportunities. I moved to New York in 2017 and I am loving every minute of it.

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**VC:** Particularly since the Russo-Ukrainian war, there have been conversations in the performing arts around how people's identities are tied to who they are, and how they express them. How do your Canadian identities inform and impact who you are? Are there any tensions or conflicts that come up being a performer abroad”?

**AN:** I am extremely proud of being Canadian. I am very aware that the opportunity in music was afforded to me because of having had the good fortune of growing up in a very special part of the world. The excellent training and opportunities growing up in the great white north have always motivated me to be an ambassador for Canada possible, no matter where in the world.

**LSJ:** I still identify as very Canadian. Although I am now a dual citizen, I appreciate being able to vote in my adopted country, I represent it, and I'm proud to do so. I'm also recently a member of the Canadian Musician's Association. I imagine that!



**AL:** I think growing up, musically speaking, and playing as part of the Toronto indie-label scene very much influenced my identity as a musician here. The Toronto indie-labels helped me realize the importance of the market.

THANKS.

There was some incredible and important music happening and I lived in Toronto, with major superstars like Drake and The Weeknd building their music careers on the Toronto scene. But I think the depth of Toronto music that time can also be seen with bands like Death From Above 1979 and the whole community around Broken Social Scene..

There is a great pride that comes with being a Canadian musician overseas. Somebody once told me there are no greater ambassadors than those that live abroad, and I think Canadian musicians are no exception.

**VC: How do you find the musical institutions, such as orchestras, different between the two countries?**



**LSJ:** I once wrote a post begging the Canadian government to embrace the American idea of philanthropy. In the US, donations to the arts are completely tax-free, creating a huge incentive for giving to one's favorite orchestra. In Canada they still tax donations to orchestras or festivals, so they're *higher taxes for everything (true) so why should I give this orchestra if half goes to the government? Let them take care of it.*

Which it does to an extent. The Canada Council, which serves about 35 million people, is roughly the same as the NEA for 330 million. For example, the NY Philharmonic program (donors start at 1M USD) and

equivalent - the Toronto Symphony, where even corporate donors are Canadian.

Canadians cannot learn philanthropy without incentive, and I've spent 10 years. I also wouldn't give my money to a treasured institution if it was only going to get half. In this case I feel like Canada gets it a bit better.

**AL:** I definitely agree with Lara on this topic. When I was living in Canada, I was fortunate to be the recipient of many grants provided on a federal level for musicians, but I totally agree with Lara in that Canada has a different system of philanthropy. In Canada, a real dependency on government support for supporting artists exists, but I think all arts organizations can learn from a model that utilizes multiple systems of funding, like private foundation support, and endowments.



**VC:** The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts reports that the current unemployment rate for artists is still twice what it was pre-pandemic. How did you spend your time during the pandemic? What is the most challenging and positive, that you are seeing on the projects you are involved in?

**LSJ:** I created a piano-free chamber music series for six months starting in June 2021 which would never have happened without Covid, but it was a great experience which became creative and some fund-raising projects.

or a great space which became empty, and some fund-raising times. We had amazing groups and artists, like the Imani Wind Xavier Foley, Ulysses Quartet, Augustin Hadelich, PubliQuartet also recorded a new album of solo violin works in that space (s I somehow also decided to learn Cuban foot percussion, which have been a thing sans Covid. But now, I can clave and cascara simultaneously play violin. I'm inordinately wackily proud of th

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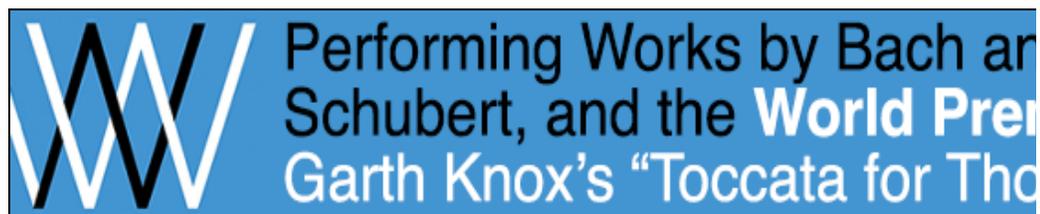
**AN:** It was extremely busy pre-pandemic for me with lots of tra shut down of NYC for the pandemic afforded me the unexpected spend an entire year in my neighbourhood on the upper west : opportunity to see the four seasons of New York in Riverside Pa time during the pandemic making digital content for and with Society in Boston. Another unexpected bright side of having to performances was that I was able to find more time to connect donors. Of course it was from a distance! But, having the time : conversations was really interesting for me. I always enjoy spe often at concerts, my performing duties prevent me from sper want to with chatting with people.

**AL:** I had a similar experience to Aisslinn where the time just be incredibly busy, and then in March of 2020 as New York City we it created an opportunity to shift that pace. I feel really fortuna adapt in terms of teaching and collaborating with other musici ways during that time, but I also found that period to be a real

me in terms of songwriting.

Once the lock-down in New York was lifted, I remember traveling to New York City. Lara held her chamber music series for a “socially-distanced” performance. I was working on for *Child USA*. It was the first time I had played with other musicians in-person in months, and I can’t even describe how much that moment was important for me. In the past year I’ve had many performances that were rescheduled because of Covid-related factors, but one thing that has come out of these disappointments is how much people are craving and supporting live performances again. My sense, at least here in New York, is that there is a greater appreciation for music and the contributions that musicians make.

**VC: Aislinn, you spent many years performing in Tafelmusik with the baroque violinist Jeanne Lamon, and later in October you’re moving to Toronto to lead the orchestra from the chair that Music Director has held for 33 years.**



**What has been the role of mentorship, specifically female mentors, in your career? And do you currently consider yourself a mentor to other musicians?**

**AN:** I did have the honor of working with the late, great Jeanne Lamon. She bestowed many gifts upon me, perhaps none bigger than quietly demonstrating strong, dynamic and caring leadership at every opportunity. Her abilities were so great and so varied that it’s difficult for me to

special about working with and for her. But, one thing does stand out right now and I will say that Jeanne, in my opinion, always did give the most careful considerations of the music before anything else. The music community deeply respected her willingness to serve the music. I believe that her performances were so dynamic and deeply meaningful. I could not have done today if not for great leaders like Jeanne Lamon.

**VC: Adrienne, as someone who has been actively involved in jazz and rock music communities, do you feel like you've seen a better representation in one genre over another?**

**AL:** I once read that only 11% of professional double bass players are women, so I'm sure there are many, many factors informing this statistical imbalance. It is definitely true that I never had any female bass teachers as a child, which is so rare to see a female bass player perform or on a recording.



I do believe in the importance of mentorship and take my teaching seriously. I've done songwriting collaborations with other female musicians in the past, and I'm recording an album for one of my groups with a female producer for the first time in my career. I can't say for sure if there's a greater shift in the industry, but I am happy and proud to be a part of any opportunities for young women to feel like they can be leaders of the music industry.

**VC:** A recent study by the Donne Foundation looking at the orchestras found that only 5% of the music programmed in composed by women. In great contrast to this data, Lara, your album *she/her/hers* for solo violin features music entirely by women. As women in the music industry, what do you think needs to be done to bring about meaningful and lasting change that ensures an equality of opportunity for female performers, composers, and leaders?

**AN:** I think that we need to make sure that women are as fully represented in their pursuit of a career in music. I specialize in 18th and 19th century music, so during the pandemic I spent time looking at composers from that time who may have been overlooked because of the gender inequality women experienced at that time. Lousie Farrenc, Jane Mary Glover, and Clara Schumann Martines are just a few names of composers who I think have been neglected in what we think of as the classical music canon and I want to get their music as much as possible. It's been so interesting to get



**LSJ:** And, I tend to go a bit RBG here - sure, my latest album is composed by women, but I've done lots of albums entirely by male composers, and that's been seen as not unusual, of course. We have precious few women composers in the supposed "height" of "European Art Music" because they were not allowed to have ideas of their own at that time (and frankly, they were



overtly). Therefore, my album is from the last 100 years or so, and living composers, each one of which I felt confident and glad to become far more numerous.

**AL:** I spent many years touring with an all-female band, and it is surprising to people, especially other music industry types, that we are a female-fronted group, but also running the business side of our instruments, writing our own songs, carrying our own gear, and traveling from city to city.

Lara is the owner of her own record label, Ancalagon Records, and has performed in ensembles around the world, but this still feels pretty exceptional. We do have a long way to go in terms of gender equality at the top level of the industry, but I am incredibly proud to be in the company of people like Lara and I who are making real change in terms of visibility and opportunities for women.

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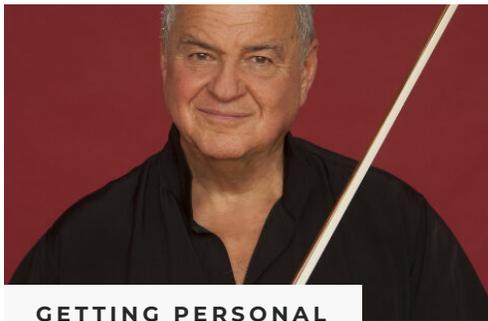
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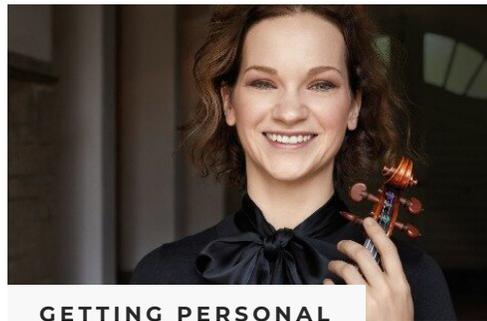
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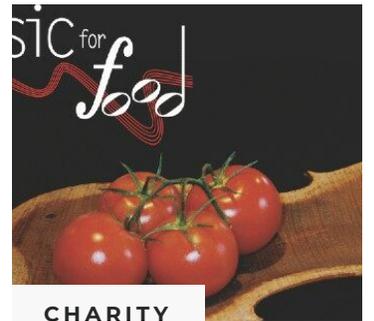
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