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Violinist Lara St. John to Perform Vivaldi Masterpiece with South Florida Symphony

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Lara St. John was a typical two and a half-year-old—she wanted whatever shiny new toy her five year-old brother Scott had. But one day he came home with something that would influence the rest of her life.

“According to my mother, my brother came home one day with a little violin and I was the kind of younger sister who got quite jealous and screamed and yelled until I got one too,” says St. John.

Today, the Canadian-born St. John is one of the most popular violinists in the world, an international performer who has played with world-class musicians and orchestras all over the world. She will perform Antonio Vivaldi’s The Four Seasons with the South Florida Symphony (formerly the Key West Symphony Orchestra) for their inaugural season finale on Friday, April 23, at Broward Center in Fort Lauderdale.

St. John has her own take on Vivaldi’s most famous piece, which is a wedding favorite and has been used in a slew of films.

“I think there’s a lot that can be done with it that often isn’t,” says St. John. “It’s incredibly descriptive, with the violinist basically imitating different things—the nightingale, the summer storm, the shepherd bemoaning his fate, teeth chattering as people slip on the ice. Vivaldi manages to bring all this out with just some strings and a solo violin. I tend to go on the extremely descriptive side of The Four Seasons.”

While jealousy got her started on the violin, natural talent made her stick with it.

“The violin is something you can start young, because they do make very small ones, as opposed to, say, a bassoon or a tuba,” says St. John. “My brother and I have always had fights about whether or not it’s in-born or not, but we both have perfect pitch and really good memories for music, so it just seemed like the natural thing to do.”

The siblings don’t come from a particularly musical family, although St. John says that her father “strummed away on a guitar” and Mom played some “mediocre piano” while she and her brother were growing up.

“It’s kind of an anomaly,” say St. John. “In fact, in the music world, as far as we know, we are the only siblings who are at this level who don’t come from a musical family.”

St. John began performing when she was four years old, and made her European debut at 10. “I tried to quit a couple of times when I was a teeny-bopper, but I always ended up going back,” says St. John. “I can’t live without

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music. To me it's not so much the violin, it's all about the music."

While St. John doesn't like to play favorites among the pieces she plays, there are some pieces that stand out for her.

"The Shostokovich for me is probably the most physical," says St. John. "It's funny that people don't realize how physical this really is because it's art. Obviously it's not the same as being an Olympic athlete, but it is a very physical thing. Combined with the emotional thrall that you need to go through, it can be quite draining."

One of her goals is to make classical music more accessible to younger audiences. St. John believes that way to creating future classical music fans is to break the rules, be approachable and expose young kids to it.

"I don't like the perception among young people that it's music for your grandmother," says St. John. "Sure, you can't learn all about it in five minutes the way you can with a rock song, but that's what makes it so worthwhile. The exposure to the great works ought to be there. It takes more work to appreciate classical that it does other genres. It takes more patience, and maybe that's why it tends to be an older audience. Youth is impetuous, and maybe that's why we don't have a younger audience."

St. John is in the midst of recording a new CD of all Mozart compositions, along with her brother and the The Knights, a chamber orchestra in Brooklyn. Aside from classical, her musical tastes are quite eclectic. She has her own polka band and also performs Klezmer music. She digs Pink Floyd, Boston, The Doors and Radiohead. She is a "massive" George Gershwin fan, likes jazz and has a large collection of Eastern European folk music. She has commissioned Kurt Weill song arrangements for violin and piano.

St. John is looking forward to her visit to South Florida for another reason besides the concert. She is also an amateur herpetologist, and is looking forward to seeing the native lizards and reptiles up close and personal.

"I'm always up for meeting new gators, because I love them," she says.

She is the proud mom to a nine-month old iguana. "He's got a little leash," says St. John. "I can't wait until it warms up in New York and me and the little guy can go for a walk in the park."

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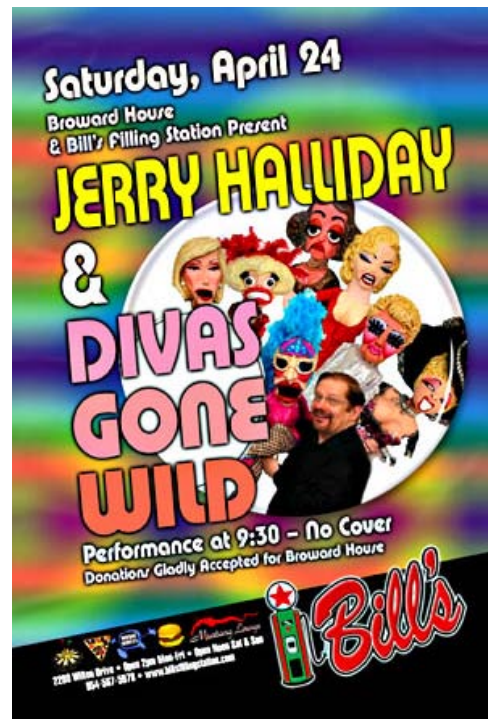
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