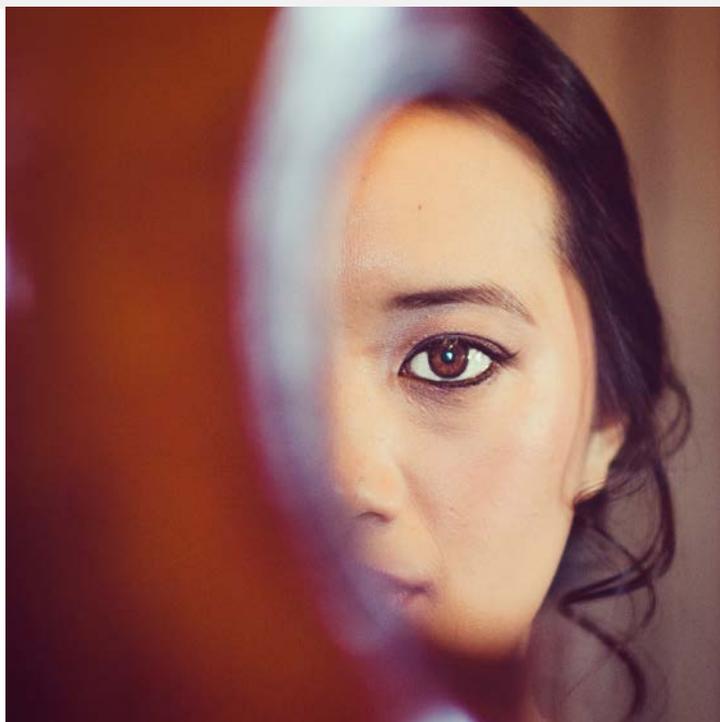


Alumnus and past concertmaster of the EUYO and Principal First Violin of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra in Ireland for two years, Sarah Sew is back to talk about directing the EUYO on their recent Europe Day tour to Alicante and South America

June 2018



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Rebecca Humphrey, the EUYO's Communications Officer, caught up with EUYO alumnus and past concertmaster Sarah Sew to talk about the life and career of the Principal First Violin, the EUYO 'spirit' and coming back to direct the Orchestra on the 2018 Europe Day tour to Alicante and South America...

RH: You have had an impressive career so far; you were concertmaster of the EUYO from 2010-2012, spent two years as Principal First Violin of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra in Ireland, later appearing as Guest Leader and Co-Leader of orchestras including BBC Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Ireland, English Symphony Orchestra, Balkan Chamber Orchestra and the Human Rights Orchestra in Lucerne. Can you tell us what initially inspired you in the direction of becoming a concertmaster?

SS: I strongly believe that every role in an orchestra is equally important, just as one would say in a string quartet, wind quintet or brass dectet. I've actively sought to sit in many different positions to learn as much as I can about orchestral playing. I feel this is important to build understanding and accuracy in perspective on how an orchestra works. However, it is the concertmaster role that I've always liked the most and felt most comfortable in. I love the freedom to inspire and the pressure that comes with the role. The expectation of being prepared both technically and musically is what continually drives me to improve.

RH: What was your favourite moment working with the EUYO?

SS: It's difficult to choose just one moment! Musically, I will never forget my very first tour, Shostakovich 4 with Ashkenazy; my favourite musical experience, Bruckner 7 with Blomstedt; or my first tour as Concertmaster, Tchaikovsky 6 with Nosedá. However, on a personal level, I treasure all the friends I met in the orchestra, many of whom I still see when passing through different cities. It is from these friends that I learnt to work extremely hard, continue to challenge myself, to be open-minded and to work together. These are values I will keep with me for life.

RH: When people talk about EUYO, they often mention the EUYO 'spirit'. What does this mean to you?

SS: For me, the EUYO 'spirit' is a kind of musical and humanistic idealism. In a world where people are becoming increasingly divided, the concept of young musicians coming together with the purpose of performing music at the highest possible level is desperately valuable. Social media is changing how we form relationships, present and express ourselves, and there is a risk of thinking increasingly egocentrically. The EUYO gives young musicians a space to collaborate, learn about others and work together in the pursuit of world-class performance.

You have just returned from leading the EUYO on an exciting Europe Day Tour to Alicante and South America. What was it like returning to direct the Orchestra and what did this experience mean to you?

It was a very special experience for me to direct the orchestra and work with the current generation of Europe's very best young musicians. The diverse programme spanned from Rameau to Piazzolla, covering a wide range of European and South American composers. We delved into style in each piece, exploring a balance between authenticity and fresh performance whilst over the two weeks developing as an ensemble, always building trust in each other. For me, the most exciting things were the concerts – giving something

Sarah leading a group of EUYO musicians in a performance at Centro Cultural Kirchner, Buenos Aires, last month



spontaneous, and every performance was a different experience. Live performance is something incredibly special, to be experienced just one time, a connection between musicians and audience. We played in such a variety of acoustics: from traditional theatres in Sao Paulo and Montevideo, to large modern concert halls in Alicante and Buenos Aires, to the outdoor stage of the Auditório in Ibirapuera Park, Brazil. The combination of musical commitment, youthful energy and desire to create inspiring live performance is what makes the EUYO such a unique group of musicians.

RH: You performed with the EUYO on the 2012 spring tour to North America and now six years later, you are back leading part of the Orchestra on exciting projects in both South America and (in July) in Shanghai. How do you feel coming back to the Orchestra now, not playing but rather, directing projects?

SS: Directing is something that developed naturally from leading and has continued to challenge me, particularly in finding the balance between authenticity and creativity in a work. The opportunities I had to develop as a concertmaster in the EUYO have shaped the musician I am now and will be as I continue developing in the future.

When directing I have to think about so many things at once – I see it as combining the roles of a chamber musician, concertmaster and conductor. I think about not just my own playing or giving physical cues and indications, but having an artistic conception and inspiring others to follow this conception through our work in rehearsals. Listening is crucial and being able to understand how the music is functioning (thematically, in terms of part writing, harmonically or structurally) is important in being able to rehearse in an efficient way, which brings an artistic conception to life. I always try to be open-minded and creatively influenced, and see any directed project as a culmination of the ideas of the group.

RH: You play an Italian violin by Gennaro Gagliano from c.1760. What is special about this instrument, and also maker, to you?

SS: Without a doubt, my violin's best quality is its clarity of sound. It has taken me a number of years to discover the minute details in intonation and countless possibilities in tone production that the violin has within it. I played on a violin by the same maker, on loan from the Royal Academy of Music during my studies, and a large proportion of my practice and development was spent on a violin, which I had to return once my studies were completed. It is a common difficulty for string players to be searching for not just an instrument but also the finance to pay for it at a very challenging point in their career. I really empathise with this, but do feel that the struggle is worth it, as we will grow with our instrument over our entire life.

Sarah on the front desk with the EUYO at Arthur Rubinstein Philharmonic Hall, Łódź, Poland, under Gianandrea Noseda, 2010



RH: In addition to your performance work, you have recently been appointed Professor of Violin and Head of Strings at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. How do you feel about this new role and what would you like to be doing in ten years' time?

SS: Over the last decade we have experienced a monumental shift in the classical music industry with the growing importance of free video and audio sharing, social media and the enormous advances in technology. In today's professional world, a huge variety of skills are expected and essential for success. Collaboration, entrepreneurialism, resourcefulness, research, technological skills, self-promotion, business and interpersonal skills are all becoming increasingly important for young musicians of today. While I will always consider myself primarily a violinist and performer, having a leading role in training the next generation in this time of extraordinary change is important, exciting and a huge challenge. I hope to promote and enrich the music scene in Ireland on an international level, connecting students and professionals. The Beckett Chamber Music Series which I curate in Dublin sees collaboration between some of Ireland's most interesting musicians, both emerging and established, and leading literary scholars in a series of concerts and discussion events which explore the connections between music and words. Amongst my favourite artists, there is an incredible depth of research combined with an inventiveness in performance which inspires my practice, career choices and future aims. As for the last part of the question, I'm not somebody who is particularly goal driven, simply as I feel there are too many elements in our lives which we cannot control. All I can say is that in ten years time I hope to be a better violinist, musician and human being than I am today.

RH: You chose an exciting career, but the professional music life must take a supreme amount of work, patience and diligence. What advice can you offer to young aspiring musicians hoping to do the same?

SS: Although there is no substitute for a large volume of quality (and slow!) practice, musicians of today have incredible resources readily available. I spend a large amount of time on Spotify listening to recordings, on YouTube watching live performances and masterclasses and on IMSLP and New York Philharmonic Archives looking at scores, manuscripts and bowed parts. I record my practice using Garageband or Audacity (open source) and have metronome and tuner apps on my phone. There are so many incredibly useful tools and so much information online, all freely available. I would advise young musicians to use everything they have available to learn. However, my number one piece of advice is to cultivate a genuinely inquiring musical mind which will lead you, inspire you and drive you in this hugely challenging but incredibly rewarding career.

Want to hear more?

Watch Sarah Sew & Tadashi Imai perform Prokofiev Violin Sonata No.1 at [Wigmore Hall](#)



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The EUYO is funded with support from the European Union's Creative Europe programme and from the 28 member governments of the European Union, under the auspices of the International Youth Foundation recognised in the United Kingdom as a charity, Reg No 281420. VAT No GB 240 4275 91