

## Itzhak Perlman presents his first solo recital in Nashville in nearly 20 years

By John  
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"If you wanted to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, you couldn't be too particular," says Itzhak Perlman. "You couldn't say, 'Hey, I'm not going to perform on a show with a bunch of monkeys,' because the chances were good that Sullivan would book a show that featured monkeys, magicians and even a classical fiddle player like me. It was a true variety show."

Perlman is speaking to the *Scene* by phone about his recital this Sunday at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, where he'll join pianist Rohan De Silva to perform music by Vivaldi, Schumann, Beethoven and Ravel, among others. One of the most recognizable figures in contemporary classical music, Perlman has been a Kennedy Center honoree and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award winner. He made his first indelible impression on the American public in 1958, when he appeared on Sullivan's popular program.

"Sullivan wanted to do a show with an Israeli theme, so he came to Israel in 1957 to find acts," remembers Perlman. "I was 13 years old at the time and had polio, and I think that caught Sullivan's attention. After my appearance, I moved to the States to study at Juilliard."

Perlman is still at New York City's Juilliard School. Since 2003, he has held the post once filled by his former — and legendary — violin teacher, Dorothy DeLay. Not surprisingly, Perlman says his teaching style is modeled on DeLay's.

"At first, I was very uncomfortable with Dorothy's style," says Perlman. "I was used to teachers who simply told me what to do. My first teacher at Juilliard, Ivan Galamian, was like that. He had a method and taught everyone the same way. Dorothy wanted to involve the student in the process. She was from Kansas and would say, 'Now sugar plum, what do you think about that phrase?' She wanted us to listen and think critically."

DeLay's approach obviously worked, because Perlman went on to become one of the most illustrious classical performers of the past 50 years. He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 1963, when he was just 18, and a year later won the prestigious Leventritt Competition. He made one more valedictory appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, appearing on the same episode as The Rolling Stones. Then he hit the orchestra circuit, performing with every major ensemble in every important concert hall in Europe, the United States and Asia.

Perlman has also spent a considerable amount of time in the studio, recording a broad swath of the solo, chamber and concerto repertoire for the violin, earning 15 Grammy Awards in the process. He cemented his status as America's premier fiddle player in 1993, when he contributed the deeply felt violin solos for the Steven Spielberg film *Schindler's List*.

As a performer, Perlman is known as the greatest living exponent of the Romantic style. He plays with grand gestures, intense emotion, a huge vibrato and unadulterated lyricism. His approach does not appeal to all tastes. Writer and critic Ted Libbey notes that Perlman "often skates by on talent and showmanship." Perhaps, but there's no denying that Perlman plays a mean fiddle.

In recent years, Perlman has been branching out, dividing his time between performing, conducting and teaching. At the podium, he has served as principal guest conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. In 2007, he became artistic director of New York's Westchester Philharmonic. As a conductor, Perlman has shown a penchant for meat-

and-potatoes repertoire, focusing on works by Beethoven, Brahms and Tchaikovsky.

"Conducting has really improved my playing," says Perlman. "It provides me with a much more comprehensive understanding of the composers whose music I play."

Teaching serves a similar purpose. In addition to his work at Juilliard, Perlman has spent the past two decades teaching at the Perlman Music Program, founded in 1995 by Perlman's wife Toby. The program, located in an expansive arts center on Shelter Island at the eastern end of Long Island, provides training to exceptional string students ages 11 to 18.

"It's helped me immensely to explain what I do — what I've always done instinctively without always thinking about it — to students," says Perlman. "It's added transparency to my own playing."

Perlman last performed a solo recital in Nashville in 1996. Has his playing changed much since then?

"I wouldn't say it has changed, but it has evolved," he says. "Over time, I've thought a great deal about the works on the program, so there will be subtle differences in nuance and color from what you might have heard on my records. That's one thing you won't get at my concerts: I don't play the record."