

## **Notables**

### **Episode 10: Anne Akiko Meyers**

#### **TRANSCRIPT**

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**Noah:** You are listening to Notables, an Education Through Music podcast. As always, I'm your host, Noah, and I'm joined for today's episode by Anne Akiko Myers. Anne is a Grammy Award-nominated violinist who has been called the Wonder Woman of commissioning by the Strad. Now, without any further ado, thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk to me.

**Anne:** Oh, thank you, Noah. Thank you so much for having me and setting this up today.

**Noah:** Of course. So, this being a show about music education and what role it plays in the lives of notable musicians and music industry adjacent professionals, I'm wondering how it is that you came to be a musician.

**Anne:** Well, a very, very long time ago, my mother read that music would really help the development of a baby's brain, and so she would play music for me while she was pregnant, and after I was born she played a lot of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, with David Oistrakh playing. And you know, when a baby is eating, they are just having such a sensory overload of happiness, and so she would often play music while feeding me as well, and so I had this steady diet of kind of musical offerings until I actually picked up the violin when I was four, and I took to it really quite instantaneously and was very fortunate to have a violin program in the public school that I went to in Richcrest, California, a very small town in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

**Noah:** And so you were in kindergarten and in preschool and you had access to music instruction already in preschool and you had access to music instruction already.

**Anne:** Yeah, so they offered a variety of instruments and I took to the violin immediately.

**Noah:** Wow.

**Anne:** And you know there were stories of like running from tap dancing class to playing with the orchestra, the local orchestra and it was a really fun time of lessons with Shirley Helmick and the Suzuki method was part of my whole upbringing.

**Noah:** Yeah, you began with this access to this excellent public school music offering, which is wonderful. You eventually outgrew it, if I understand your biography correctly. So where did you go from there?

**Anne:** Well, I was very fortunate in that Shirley Helmick allowed me to learn how to read the notes instead of just playing it by rote which is...

**Noah:** Which is more Suzuki?

**Anne:** Yes, but I would go on tour with the Suzuki kids and winning a competition when I was seven and we went to Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center and I met President Jimmy Carter.

**Noah:** Oh wow.

**Anne:** And it was really an exciting time and you know, it came..there came a time when I realized that I needed a little more intensive training and so us living in Richcrest was about three, four hours away from La Cunada, California. And my parents found this amazing teacher, Alice Schoenfeld, who I went and performed for and she invited me to come be a student and thankfully my father got a position in the Pasadena area. So we moved there when I was seven, and then I continued my studies with Alice and her sister Eleanor Schoenfeld, and then I continued my studies with Alice and her sister Eleanor Schoenfeld at what was then the Colburn School of Performing Arts, the community school of performing arts. I have to add that prior to that though, I mean, my mother was really making the trip driving me in her little VW Beetle, where I was practicing in the front seat, if you can believe it, and my sister was also taking violin at the time and piano lessons, and so we would drive all this way to get lessons. It's extraordinary, the commitment a parent can make.

**Noah:** Yeah, and on the bright side. You know, as you move through four hours of travel and you lose radio stations, if you've got the same you know you've got the same number. You can practice the entire way that's...

**Anne:** And drive my family insane, I guess.

**Noah:** Yeah, I know. Maybe the one thing worse than losing a station in the middle of a good tune is having to listen to an etude as it's being practiced. I mean, that commitment is really something, is really spectacular. I have to imagine is one of the things that has set you up for the success that you've had over this long career, this illustrious career. Which leads me to another question, which is you've studied...you've mentioned a couple of your teachers so far, and there are others, and this is you know..you're part of a long lineage of some really spectacular, maybe even legendary music teachers violin teachers specifically and so I'm wondering what are some of the characteristics of the approaches that these teachers had and used that you feel have set you up for success?

**Anne:** So when I was about 14 years old, we made the move to New York City and drove across the country on invitation by a legendary violin teacher, Dorothy DeLay. And you know, it was just amazing to arrive here and not know what to expect, and the level of talent at the Juilliard School was so high and I was just kind of thrust in this large pond of violinists and...

**Noah:** As a teenager, no less.

**Anne:** Yeah, as a teenager, you're kind of just figuring everything out.

**Noah:** Right.

**Anne:** But I had an amazing experience with Dorothy and also with Masao Kawasaki, and I would have lessons two, three times a week with both of them. Also with Felix Gallimere I studied chamber music and it was a really just a rich time of music cultivation and exploration and I think that Dorothy was extraordinary in that she had a different approach for each student and she...really her philosophy was that you end up teaching yourself. You have to find your sound, you have to find your signature, you have to find your signature. So working with that and building that kind of system behind and foundation meant going to the library and studying vinyl, studying CDs...

**Noah:** Crate digging.

**Anne:** Yeah, crate digging. I also loved going to Tower Records when it existed and record stores and just buying hundreds of CDs and listening to them in my apartment. I just loved being so avidly curious about music and all the forms. It could tell you a story.

**Noah:** Yeah.

**Anne:** And that's.. I think the underlying foundation was that you have to discover for yourself what's going to work.

**Noah:** There are two things that really stand out to me, but I want to start with this idea that you're teaching yourself. But there's also this differentiated approach that Dorothy DeLay is using in giving you the tools that you need in order to teach yourself. So she's not making a violinist, she's like giving you the...just arraying some, some methods and materials in front of you to allow you to make yourself into a violinist.

**Anne:** She was very much like Yoda. She knew how to cultivate and bring out the best potential from each student, and that was her magic.

**Noah:** Yeah, there are scenes in the Star Wars films where Luke is a little frustrated with Yoda. Was that...did that ever happen?

**Anne:** Oh, yeah. Many, many times, I mean, I would leave a lesson and just feel completely lost, like I was falling through a cloud. I didn't understand what was happening, how to seek it out, how to make it come into focus, and I think that's really a scary, you know, time for any student. But that...from that comes. You know, you're almost like your own wisdom. By going to concerts, listening and listening, listening and studying all the greats, all the violinists and it doesn't have to be just violinists, instrumentalists, pianists, conductors, orchestras just understanding the sound of music, you know, and the composers, what they're trying to say too, and making it yours, like having it come from your soul, your heart and your vision. You know, that's what is so important.

**Noah:** That process of seeking out and, and studying and and looking for your own path through the, the paths of other musicians who have come before you. Is that what allowed you to break through those moments of frustration, or is..is there, I guess I'm asking, asking for a friend, asking on behalf of students who are finding themselves in a situation where they are not sure where to go. Like they, they feel like they're not ever going to be able to break through to the understanding. Like what else can you give them?

**Anne:** You know, lots of times I would actually be tired of my sound, my own sound, and so I would try to explore and see how to actually change it by..I think that when you're striving for something as an artist, there's always going to be this undercurrent of like am I doing the right thing? You know you're..you're always kind of picking almost at yourself a little bit and just to be able to keep your eyes and your ears open throughout that process will help you grow, no matter what, because that's, to me, a growing period when you feel stuck, you're actually growing.

**Noah:** Right.

**Anne:** You don't see it as that, but you are.

**Noah:** Yeah, because that is...the way you've been doing things not working anymore and needing a new way.

**Anne:** Right.

**Noah:** And so growth is how you get there.

**Anne:** And the only way to figure it out or to find out if it's going to work is to try. That's the only way and you can...you know, it could actually have you fail, but at least you've tried.

**Noah:** Right.

**Anne:** And there's just such beauty and power in trying.

**Noah:** Your career is, I think, unique in many ways, but one of the particularly notable ways is in the way in which you engage with living composers in order to help secure more, more works, more notes on the page, more new, new music.

**Anne:** Yeah.

**Noah:** I guess the question that I'm getting to is the normal paradigm is that the composer hands down the music, the performer... it goes through the performer to a listener.

**Anne:** Right.

**Noah:** But you're sort of moving in reverse, sort of against that grain of, of that normal paradigm. What is that experience like? What prompted that experience? And, and how does it work?

**Anne:** So I think when I recorded my first album at 18, I chose to record the Barber Violin Concerto, which back then wasn't really performed all that much. But this music really spoke to me on such a deep level and it's almost like operatic in its breadth and lyricism.

**Noah:** Right.

**Anne:** And so I think that kind of set the tone for works that I wanted to explore and reach out to composers like Arvo Pärt, you know.

**Noah:** Yeah.

**Anne:** He's the opposite end of Barber, but there's like this minimalistic spirituality...

**Noah:** Right.

**Anne:** That's so deep and inherent in his works that you know... To be able to just reach in that sound world and play those scenes gives you something just so different, you know, and it makes you appreciate, like the Vivaldi and and the Mendelssohns and the Schubert's and you know, it's almost like the composers that I've worked with today are those reenacted, like the Schuberts and the Mendelssohns of yesteryear are walking amongst us today.

**Noah:** Right.

**Anne:** And to be able to just sit in a room with them and hear how their mind works and their process of writing you know is so endlessly fascinating to me and to actually even edit a work. You know, I always think, god, if I could just go back in time and be like what the heck were you thinking there?

**Noah:** I'm tempted to ask for specifics on which works need revision.

**Anne:** Yeah, but also just to even, you know, pester someone like Rachmaninoff to the ends of the earth, you know, to write something for violin which I so wish I could have done.

**Noah:** Or Chopin or some of these other...

**Anne:** Yeah, it's just extraordinary the lineage and the works out there and you know I just feel so, so fortunate and blessed to have worked with, like Morton Lordson and the poetry that he's brought to his music, or John Corleone, Mason Bates, Arvo Pärt I mean it's just amazing. And Arturo Marquez, you know, like the sound world/cloud that he's brought, including mariachi and Mexican traditional music, you know, to the concert hall. I mean that's just so important to me, to be able to share that with other violinists and with audiences.

**Noah:** Would you use the word collaboration as...

**Anne:** Yeah, I think it's a collaboration, but yeah, it just, it kind of blows my mind when I think of all these composers, because they just have such important stories to share. You never know until you ask. You know there could be some composers who are just too busy or just not that interested in wanting to write what you've requested. So I mean, of course, I've been turned down many, many times, but you know, I've been also really surprised by how many composers are just like. I've been waiting to be asked to write this violin concerto for 25 years or 30 years, and that was Arturo Marquez. You know, I cried when I heard that.

**Noah:** And what a service you've done for the listener and for other violinists in serving as this catalyst to bring this out. In returning to this question of what your teachers were able to inspire in you and you know the commitment that your parents made to your developing musicianship and that sort of thing I'm wondering...

**Anne:** I also have to say, you know, I was very, very fortunate to get many scholarships, from the Boys and Girls Clubs of America to private sponsorships and the Avery Fisher Award. I mean all these helpful scholarships really, you know, take the life of a student and helps put... not only belief in their talent and in their hard work and dedication, but really helps with lessons and all the daily grind that it takes, you know, with transportation and even what to wear on stage. I mean the instruments themselves are so expensive. There's just so much that goes into the creation of an artist, and so I just feel incredibly grateful for all that help that I've had from so many different organizations.

**Noah:** Yeah, they're part of the legacy of creating the artist that you are and the service that your art is to the listener, to thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of listeners.

**Anne:** But you know, because I was given so much, I feel like it's my time and absolute joy to help students as well, and it's really important that I'm giving philanthropically as well as just with concerts or whatever instruments I love to loan young students bows, violins.

**Noah:** Strads?

**Anne:** Strads...well, a strad doesn't belong to me anymore.

**Noah:** And now for a short break. This podcast is made possible by Education Through Music. ETM's mission is to positively impact student motivation, achievement and self-confidence by partnering with under-resourced schools to integrate music education into the core curriculum. To find out more or to support ETM in its mission, go to [etmonline.org](http://etmonline.org).

**Noah:** On the same topic...So I read that your decision as a seven-year-old to become a professional violinist took place at the Hollywood Bowl.

**Anne:** Yes.

**Noah:** That was the same place at which you went out of your way to make sure that there were tickets available to some young violin students, which I think is such a cool way of kind of closing the circle. You know, maybe that was also a concert where a violinist decided that they would become a professional.

**Anne:** Yeah, it leaves such a deep, deep impression on a child or somebody studying music. And just to be able to experience being at a live concert is so different than watching it on YouTube or just, you know, hearing it on the fly. Like to actually see the orchestra and feel the vibrations of the music coming out and to eat dinner in the bleachers of the Hollywood Bowl. You know that's the fun part too. To get the full experience is important and I really believe that that helps us all.

**Noah:** I know from personal experience that every time I see a live show or a live concert, that is...like I come home, recommitted to the idea of making things for people to listen to, and it's like free energy, well for the cost of a ticket. But if you're covering the cost of the ticket you've provided these young musicians free energy. So it's an important thing to keep in mind for anybody who loves music is that you got to go see some live shows every once in a while.

**Anne:** Yes, definitely.

**Noah:** Anne, this has been such a joy. Thank you so much for...

**Anne:** Thank you so much.

**Noah:** For talking to me and talking to our viewers and listeners.

**Anne:** Thank you.