



**NEW YORK TIMES**

## **Cabdriver Thanked for Returning a Stradivarius**

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Published: May 7, 2008

NEWARK — The violinist stood on a makeshift stage between two lampposts crowned with a patina of bird droppings, under a weathered vinyl canopy hastily erected outside Newark Liberty International Airport in the taxicab holding area. The audience watched him in awe, about 50 drivers in three rows, their yellow cabs a few feet behind, some lined up neatly, others askew.

As Philippe Quint spent half an hour playing five selections, the cabbies clapped and whistled. They danced in the aisles, hips gyrating like tipsy belly dancers. “Magic fingers, magic fingers,” one called out. Another grabbed the hand of Mr. Quint’s publicist and did what looked like a merengue across the front of the “stage.”

Afterward, the virtuoso was mobbed by drivers seeking his autograph on dollar bills, napkins and cab receipts.

“It was so pleasing to see people dancing — that never happens,” said Mr. Quint, 34, a Grammy-nominated classical violinist. “These people, they work so hard, I doubt they get a chance to get out to Carnegie Hall or Lincoln Center.”

So Mr. Quint took Carnegie Hall to them, in a miniconcert that was his way of expressing a simple sentiment: Thank you.

On April 21, Mr. Quint accidentally left a Stradivarius violin, valued at \$4 million, in the back seat of a cab that he took from the airport to Manhattan on his return from a performance in Dallas. After several frantic hours, the Newark police told him the violin had been found and was at the airport taxi stand with the cabdriver who had taken him home. The two connected, and the violin was returned.

“Anybody out here would have done the same thing,” said the driver, Mohammed Khalil, waving a hand at his laughing, dancing colleagues.

The city of Newark awarded Mr. Khalil, who has driven a taxi here since 1985, a Medallion, its highest honor. Mr. Quint gave him a \$100 tip when the violin was returned, but he wanted to do more, so he arranged for Tuesday’s concert in a parking-lot-turned-theater.

Clad in black, with his dark hair falling over his closed eyes, Mr. Quint dazzled the crowd with a theme from the movie “The Red Violin”; Gershwin’s “It Ain’t Necessarily So”; a Paganini Variation; and the Meditation from Massenet’s opera “Thaïs.” Joined by his friend Michael Bacon, a guitarist (and the brother of the actor Kevin Bacon), Mr. Quint played a piece they had composed, “Seduction Blues.”

On the horizon, there was the blocky spire that was the air traffic control tower. Every now and then a seagull would alight on one of the trailers where the cabbies play dominoes during their wait for fares. Occasionally, a silhouetted plane would glide by overhead, providing a rumbling accompaniment to the music.

But despite the setting — or maybe because of it — Mr. Quint’s audience seemed particularly moved by his gesture.

“I like that he came here,” Ebenezer Sarpeh, 46, said, in the accent of his native Ghana. “And, yeah, the music, I like it.”

It was Mr. Sarpeh who burst into spontaneous applause on several occasions and started yelling “magic fingers” during one particularly deft moment. Later, he took a turn in front of the stage and his fellow cabdrivers laughed and cheered while he shimmied and moonwalked, the Newark Taxi Cab Association’s answer to Justin Timberlake.

Like many of the cabdrivers in attendance, Mr. Sarpeh said it was the first recital by a classical violinist that he had ever attended. A few confessed that they had little more than a passing familiarity with such music. But they were proud to surround Mr. Khalil, who sat front row center in a black suit with a pink shirt and matching tie.

“If one cabby does something good, we feel like we all do something good,” said Patrick Cosmeus, 43, who has been driving for a decade and seemed a little sheepish as he admitted that he had seldom found anything more valuable than a forgotten cellphone in his taxi. “But everything we find, we always return it,” he added.

“Everything we find is valuable to someone,” Mr. Khalil pointed out. “If you lost your pen, you would think it was valuable.”

The violin that Mr. Quint left behind, which had been lent by two benefactors, was still being inspected for any problems from its journey, so he played the Tuesday program on a Guarneri.

Afterward, Mr. Quint posed for photographs with Mr. Khalil, whom he has also invited to a September concert at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. As he signed autographs, he retold the story of his lost violin and its triumphant return.

“He saw how distressed I was,” Mr. Quint said of Mr. Khalil. “He just gave it back to me and he noticed I was in no condition to go home by myself. So he said, ‘Why don’t I give you a ride home?’ I said, ‘No, no, it’s OK, I’ll take a bus, I’ll take another taxi. He said, ‘No, I’m happy to give you a ride back, because you’re my last customer.’”

As he had planned for months, Mr. Khalil retired from driving a cab the day he took Mr. Quint home.