

# Class act

VIOLINIST PHILIPPE QUINT IS MAKING HIS MARK AS A VIRTUOSO AND ACTOR, AS MELINDA BARGREEN DISCOVERS

**B**lame it on Napoleon. The emperor, bent on conquering Russia, sent Philippe Quint's Italian great-great-great grandfather into battle along with the rest of his troops. That distant relative ended up marrying the Russian-Jewish woman who nursed him back to health after he was wounded. And that's why Philippe, one of today's most intriguing young violinists, is one of those musicians who really deserve the label of 'world citizen'.

Ask him about this, and he'll laugh. 'World citizen? That sounds very big. I do travel a lot; I've just finished an absolutely insane schedule that took me to China, Europe and Georgia – American Georgia, that is – in about a month. I can't really tell you if I'm Russian, American, or European. I have a French and British name, with Russian, Italian and Jewish roots. But the way I communicate is with music, which is the absolutely essential communication – now more than ever.'

## 'I GOT TO READ WITH MATT DAMON AND DE NIRO!'

Quint, born in 1974, left the former Soviet Union in 1991 and has lived in New York City ever since. His bio may make him sound like the typical virtuoso: a concerto debut at aged nine, degrees from Juilliard after studying with the requisite famous pedagogues, Dorothy DeLay and Felix Galimir; an array of awards and grants; a discography that includes two Grammy nominations; and regular appearances at leading concert halls and festivals around the world.

But probe a little deeper, and you'll discover Quint is anything but typical. Yes, he plays the standard repertoire, from Bach and Beethoven to Brahms, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky and the other staples of the violin world. Right from the moment of his arrival in the United States, however, the country's music has been his major focus. Quint chose William Schuman's Violin Concerto for his debut recording (with Naxos, in 2001), an album that received two Grammy Award nominations and got an 'Editor's Choice' nod from both *Gramophone* and *Strad* magazines.

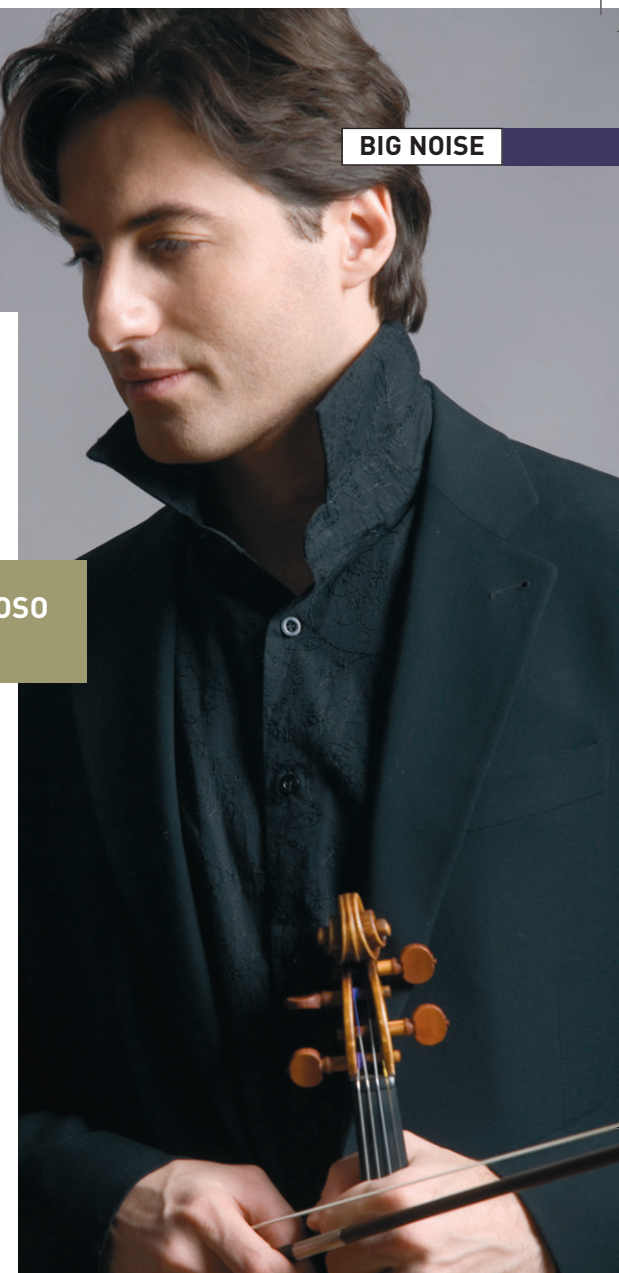
'This wasn't the result of a conscious decision,' Quint explains of his attraction to classical Americana.

'I didn't think, "Am I on the right course?" or "How should I develop?" I just greatly enjoyed this music. Most contemporary American composers had been kind of taboo in Soviet Russia; we weren't supposed to know about composers like Cage, Foss, Powell, or even Copland. It was a revelation for me to hear them and perform them.'

Other award-winning Quint discs have also focused on American music: a CD of Bernstein's *Serenade* with Marin Alsop (Naxos, 2005), Lukas Foss' violin-piano works with the composer at the keyboard (*Elysium*, 2003), Ned Rorem's Violin Concerto with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic (Naxos, 2006), and the complete violin-piano works of Miklós Rózsa with pianist William Wolfram (Naxos, 2007). More recently, Quint has recorded music of John Corigliano and Virgil Thomson, and concerti by Charles-Auguste de Bériot (both for Naxos). Upcoming projects include what Quint calls 'more mainstream works': Korngold's Violin Concerto, and works of Paganini arranged by Fritz Kreisler.

All this activity has not exactly gone unnoticed by Quint's extensive fan base. A December visit to his MySpace site showed 41,720 profile views, with about 20,000 plays of the musical clips available for instant listening. Hearing Quint sizzle his way through one of the Red Violin Caprices (by Corigliano, from the eponymous film), one can almost imagine the fiddle going up in flames. Fortunately, the \$4m 1723 'Ex-Kiesewetter' Strad, loaned to Quint by Clement and Karen Arrison through the Stradivari Society, is still intact – even though Quint inadvertently left it in a New Jersey taxi last April. (It was returned the following day.)

Off the concert stage, Quint is still a remarkable individualist. A few years ago, he undertook three years of intensive martial arts training, stopping only when 'it did a few things to my back.' He also took three years of acting courses, coming to the attention of cinema legend Robert De Niro, who wanted to cast Quint in the feature film *The Good Shepherd* alongside actor Matt Damon. De Niro finally decided Quint wasn't right for the role of the movie's KBG



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captain, but Quint remembers the whole experience fondly all the same.

'I got to read with Matt Damon and De Niro! Just saying those names makes me feel I'm making this up. When I arrived for my appointment, the guard asked me where I was going, and I said I was going to see De Niro – and just started laughing. It sounded so crazy!'

For now, Quint is focusing on the concert stage, but don't count him out when it comes to the movies. He points out the parallels between acting and playing his instrument, both of which require being in the moment and listening intently to your partners (whether they're fellow actors, chamber musicians or orchestras).

'I don't really know about the future,' Quint observes. 'I love what I'm doing – playing the violin. But film... well, I've always dreamed of playing Paganini. What an incredible figure for a movie!' ■

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