

Meet Kim Kashkashian, the ASTA 2015 Artist Teacher Award Winner

1. When did you know that you wanted to play a stringed instrument, and why did you switch to viola from violin?

I wanted to play clarinet! But the family had a violin, so that's how I began music training. And I switched to viola (same range as clarinet) as soon as I could, by borrowing an instrument from the Interlochen Arts Academy library.

2. There is always a special teacher that makes a difference in a string players' life. Who was yours and why? Karen Tuttle, because she showed me that it could feel good to be expressive with the viola. Her emphasis on body fluidity and resonance had a deep effect on my work. And, Felix Galimir, who was my musical mentor at Marlboro.

3. As a young player, what helpful advice was given to you that you'd like to share?

Above all, to listen...

4. How do you reach out to the community to inspire young players and advocate for the arts?

For six years, I have been artistic director of Music for Food, a musician's initiative to help fight hunger in our home communities. Musicians volunteer their playing and the audience donates to local food pantries. What we have discovered over the years, is that the musicians gain so much from knowing they can use their artistry as a tool of civic engagement, and the audience gains a lot by knowing that they are not passive receivers, but rather active participants in the process of turning music into food!

Should anyone care to look in more detail, our website is musicforfood.net.

5. You won a Grammy Award in 2013 for "Best Classical Instrumental Solo" — Kurtág & Ligeti: Music for Viola. As you accepted the award, what reflections were going through your mind?

It was pretty funny: I was at home in Boston, sitting in the graduation recital of one of my students! One of my students texted me the news, and we made a double celebration of it afterwards.

6. As you know, your name caused "some" confusion with another star of a similar name in the entertainment industry. You must have some comical stories to relay on this name mix-up.

It was not the first or last time! At least once a week, some stranger feels the need to make such a comment upon seeing my name - whether at a check-in, or credit card perusal or even on the phone. I am trying to learn to laugh instead of being annoyed.

7. I understand that you are an avid reader. What book are you currently reading? Any favorites?

There are a few that I recycle every year or two;

A Tale of Two Cities, Les Miserables, Don Quixote and in contemporary fiction, Mark Helprin, Ha Jin, Kingsolver

8. Now, surprise our readers.

9. Will you give us some words of wisdom or advice for aspiring artists and performers?

Go with the flow and keep your ears and mind open and receptive.

10. And, finally, why do you value membership in ASTA?

The artistic discipline is a life line into any future activity, so any organization functioning to support the arts for young people is great! ASTA does this in a most wonderful way.