



PERFORMER CORNER

Peter Ostroushko

by Mary Sorlie

When one thinks of classical string players in the Midwest, many names come to mind. When one thinks of mandolin and fiddle players, only one name comes to mind: Peter Ostroushko. Peter Ostroushko has come to be regarded as one of the finest fiddlers and mandolin players around. His musical abilities on mandolin, guitar and fiddle have brought him to stages across the world, where he has been performing for the past 25 years.

Peter was born in northeast Minneapolis. His parents were new to this country shortly before he was born. In the tight-knit Ukrainian community where he grew up, music was the language that was spoken by all. Music was played all the time. People either played an instrument or went to watch someone perform an instrument at the frequently held neighborhood gatherings. Among those many instruments Peter heard at an early age were guitar, mandolin and bala-laika.

Peter picked up the mandolin at about age four. As was true for many growing up in his neighborhood, music was mostly self-taught. He would listen to records and try to figure out what he heard. He does recall taking a few lessons on guitar, violin and piano, mostly to help with the mechanics of music and learning to read music.

Peter remembers that from an early age, he was always making up music. Because he had no “formal” training, he would often try to strengthen technical difficulties by making etudes for those specific problems. He remembers as early as grade school composing the sounds of a thunderstorm. He composes new music for the mandolin quite often these days. As for his composi-

tional process today, one of the biggest helps is keeping the radio off in his car to “keep the channels open.”

As a performer, Peter has played all over the world. When asked if he had a favorite performance experience, he simply said “the last time I did it.” He continues to look at his career as an amazing chance to continue to do what he loves.

The list of performers he has played with is extensive and varied. His recording credits began with a set on Bob Dylan’s album *Blood on the Tracks*. He has performed with Emmylou Harris, Willie Nelson, Chet Atkins, Johnny Gimble, to name just a few. He has also been a frequent performer on *A Prairie Home Companion*, a show where he served as music director from 1980-1986. He has also been seen on *Late Night with David Letterman* and even *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood*.



Peter fondly recalls getting to meet and perform with some of the musicians he looked up to while growing up. When he was in high school, he became quite interested in fiddle music. As there were no fiddlers in the area, he would go to the library and listen to records

of Southern Appalachian music. One of the first fiddlers he heard on those recordings was Marion Sumner. A few years later, Peter was performing in the south, and Marion introduced himself to Peter and asked if he could join in on that set. Peter was honored to be performing with one of his early musical influences.

The instruments on which he currently performs include the violin, guitar and mandolin. He did learn the ukulele for a job with the Minnesota Orchestra that required a ukulele and mandolin player.

He does say that he “never worked so hard” to learn a part as the ukulele part for that particular piece!

Peter has performed locally with both the Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. When playing in an orchestra, he likes to have the music well ahead of time and listen to recordings of that particular piece. He actually finds it easier to follow the entire score, than to follow just his part. He has also performed solo mandolin works with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, including his own composition *Prairie Suite*.

When he was growing up in the Twin Cities, Peter states that young musicians were given many opportunities. There were not so many musicians around and there seemed to be more opportunities to perform. Nowadays, musicians have to be as well versed in marketing as in their music. Unfortunately, it seems that young musicians have to have a CD and promo kit just to be heard at the local coffee shops. While the musical climate has become much more competitive, there is much more that the Twin Cities has to offer in terms of musical styles and offerings.

And any advice he would give to young musicians today? “Follow your bliss.” He encourages people to focus on their strengths. He considers himself very blessed to be doing what he has been doing for so many years. He has enjoyed creating and performing, but most of all sharing it with the many audiences he has been honored to play for.

Mary Sorlie is a free-lance violinist in the Twin Cities. She has played with the Minnesota Opera, Lyra Concert, Bach Society and Minnesota Sinfonia as well as in concert with Harry Connick, Jr., Luciano Pavarotti, and Vince Gill. Mary is a frequent guest conductor and string clinician in the Midwest. She conducts for the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies and teaches violin, string methods and chamber music at Northwestern College. ♪