



Hei didulum,  
Atque iterum didulum  
Felisque! Fidesque!

## Robert Maxham

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Ara Malikian

January 23, 2010

Dear Mr. Malikian,

After so thoroughly enjoying your CD *Minds*, I'm especially grateful for the opportunity to discuss its fresh and interesting program with you. As I've done over the years, I'm sending a set of questions that can help get the interview started. You need not feel constrained by them, however, as they're merely suggestions. If you want to respond to them in written form, that will be all right with me, although I've conducted the great majority of my approximately 60 interviews by telephone. If time permits, I'll send you a draft of my interview for your perusal before I submit it.

So, to the questions (and observations):

1. It seems to me that violinists during the early years of the century used to play a great number of short pieces on recital programs. Perhaps these became popular because they fit on a single side of a 78 RPM record (and perhaps, conversely, violinists played them to sell those recordings). Then came the sonata recital, which, like a defoliant, seemed kill off all these short pieces. Sonatas had titles like "Sonata No. 9, 'Kreutzer,'" while the short pieces had titles like "Album Leaf" or "Remembrance" or simply dance titles. In any case, they were more evocative. Your disc includes pieces like "Desire at Twilight," a short work that I immediately bought for my son to play after hearing your performance. Have you played any of these pieces on recitals? How do they fare with audiences? Does this kind of program set a new direction that violinists could take in reaching out to new audiences – or simply entertaining old ones?
2. In a similar way, so many of your pieces mention in their titles various keen emotions, like "Desire," or "Loneliness," "Nostalgia," or states of mind, like "Serenity." But the pieces themselves, as does Piazzolla's, suggest these emotions so strongly that titles might almost be unnecessary. Is the reintroduction of familiar emotion into recitals (remember Vivaldi's Concertos, like *L'Inquietudine* or *L'Amoroso* and the Baroque *Affektenlehre* in general) another direction that might make recitals more palatable – and popular?
3. The short pieces we hear nowadays, when they do appear, are often very familiar bon bons such as, for example, Kreisler's, Sarasate's, or Wieniawski's miniatures. But when Kreisler (or Sarasate or Wieniawski) was performing his own pieces, he kept writing new things, not relying on a very few that he had already produced. His programs offered something old, perhaps, but also a great deal that was new, sometimes even written for that very performance. Have violinists worn out their repertoire? How does it feel to present things that your audience has probably never heard before? It should seem, I think, as though you're sharing discoveries.
4. When I was in school, students in the composition department wouldn't have dared to write anything as accessible as almost anything on your program. They were restricted, if they wanted to write compositions

acceptable to the faculty, to avant-garde techniques like tone clusters, aleatoric pitches or rhythms, and novel means of tone production, like striking the back of the violin on a desk or hitting it with the bow. The idea seemed to be that, though they might be played for a particular audience, the compositions had been written for audiences many years, even centuries, in the future, when their generative ideas would have been fully assimilated. On the other hand, I think every piece in your program should be accessible on first listening to nearly every member of the audience. Pieces like "Desire," which I've singled out because it made such a deep impression at once, seem to be built from modular, repeated building blocks (that's the way Gregorian chant, similarly hypnotic, is constructed, too) that provide footholds for the listener. One of my professors once pointed out that in Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," each block is introduced and made familiar before another appears on top of it: he called it "additive technique." Do you find that audiences are at least drawn into these pieces when you perform them?

5. The pieces on your program don't seem violinistic in the traditional sense, yet the violin almost always remains at the forefront, and though the parts don't sound particularly flashy, they have a brilliance all their own. How violinistic are these pieces to play? Do they lie well for the violin?

6. Your violin has a thick, rich sound, which you nuance continually throughout. Is that violin's adaptability and general tone-quality as ideal as it sounds for these works?

7. I've noticed that you've recorded Ysaÿe's Six Sonatas. Ysaÿe's music seems highly poetic – almost like continuously improvised rhapsody rather than highly structured statement. What does it have in common – if anything – with your program here?

8. Do you have any similar programs in mind, or any other projects in mind for the near or distant future that you'd like to discuss?

The subtitle of the recital, "Poética de la Nostalgia" suggests that I could have been expecting too much from the music as a pathway into the future (when, after all, it may have been intended only as a poignant look into the past). So if I've misunderstood its intent, please feel free to explore other topics in your discussion. But please understand that I've heard so many stale performances of so much standard repertoire while listening to several hundred CDs and DVDs every year for the magazine that your recital seemed like a reinvigorating zephyr, and while I'm almost always assigned interviews, I begged for the opportunity to interview you. If I misread your intention in recording this program, I apologize – at least I meant well.

Sincerely,

Robert Maxham

P.S. My deadline requires that we get together with your answers by January 29. I hope that's not too inconvenient.