



JENNIFER KOH, Violin Biography

Recognized for intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance, Grammy Award-winning violinist Jennifer Koh is a forward-thinking artist dedicated to exploring a broad and eclectic repertoire. She has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of commissioning projects and has premiered more than 100 works written especially for her. Her quest for the new and unusual, sense of endless curiosity, and ability to lead and inspire a host of multidisciplinary collaborators, truly set her apart.

Jennifer Koh is the Artistic Director of the Fortas Chamber Music Concerts at the Kennedy Center, where, in addition to planning the concert series, she curated an immersive, all-day new music festival titled Sounds of US. The festival featured performances of more than 40 new works commissioned from composers such as Rafiq Bhatia, Anthony Cheung, Inti Figgis-Vizueta, David Ludwig, Vijay Iyer, Angélica Negrón, Carlos Simon, and Nina C. Young, as well as emerging composers and Juilliard students who were mentored by the more established artists. To close the season in June, Koh will perform J.S. Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, widely regarded as the pinnacle of writing for the instrument. In the previous Fortas season, she reprised her project Two x Four (two violinists x four composers), a celebration of mentorship in which she joined her teacher and colleague Jaime Laredo and members of the Juilliard Orchestra to perform Bach's Concerto for Two Violins in D minor, BWV 1043, alongside three contemporary double-violin concertos inspired by it.

A highlight of this season was a performance of Barber's Violin Concerto with the New York String Orchestra, conducted by Jaime Laredo at Carnegie Hall, marking the 25th anniversary of Koh's Carnegie Hall debut with the same ensemble and conductor. This season, Koh also continues her critically acclaimed series *New American Concerto*, a multi-season commissioning project that explores the form of the violin concerto through commissions from a diverse collective of composers. Last season, she premiered the seventh concerto in the series: Nina C. Young's Violin Concerto *Traces* with the LA Chamber Orchestra. Koh premiered Missy Mazzoli's Violin Concerto *Procession* with the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gemma New in

2021, and has since performed the work with orchestras around the world including the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Charlotte Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Hawaii Symphony Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, Lahti Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, London's Philharmonia Orchestra at the BBC Proms, Phoenix Symphony, and Princeton Symphony Orchestra. Additional *New American Concerto* commissions are Tyshawn Sorey's *For Marcos Balter*, premiered with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 2020; Courtney Bryan's *Syzygy*, premiered with the Chicago Sinfonietta in 2020; Lisa Bielawa's *Sanctuary*, premiered with the Orlando Philharmonic in 2019 and given its New York premiere with the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in 2021; Christopher Cerrone's *Breaks and Breaks*, premiered with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 2018; and Vijay Iyer's *Trouble* premiered at the 2017 Ojai Music Festival.

Koh's acclaimed commissioning projects include *Alone Together*, *Bach and Beyond*, *Bridge to Beethoven*, *Limitless*, and *Shared Madness*. The Grammy Award-winning *Alone Together*—launched in 2020 as a virtual performance series—was developed in response to the coronavirus pandemic and the financial hardship it placed on many in the arts community. The project brought composers together in support of the many freelancers among them, with the more established composers each donating a new micro-work for solo violin, while also recommending a fellow freelance composer to write their own solo violin micro-work on paid commission from Koh's artist-driven nonprofit ARCO Collaborative. In 2021, Cedille Records released an album of Koh's *Alone Together*, featuring 39 world-premiere recordings, including works by Du Yun, George Lewis, Tania León, Andrew Norman, Missy Mazzoli, Ellen Reid, Vijay Iyer, Nina C. Young, and Angélica Negrón, and the recording won the Grammy Award in the Best Classical Instrumental Solo category. Koh continues to perform works from *Alone Together* on her recital programs. This season, Koh gives the world premiere of a new work for violin and piano by Tania León on a recital at the Library of Congress; on that program, she also performs León's *Anima* and Angélica Negrón's *Cooper and Emma*, both written for *Alone Together*. Koh gives additional recitals this season at The McKnight Center for the Performing Arts (Oklahoma State University) and Dartmouth College, and performs in duo with Vijay Iyer at Chamber Music Maryland.

In 2022, Koh premiered *Everything Rises*, an original, evening length staged musical work co-created with bass-baritone Davone Tines, at UCSB Arts & Lectures, UCLA, and in New York at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The work, a collective exploration of family history, tells the stories of Koh's mother, Gertrude Soonja Lee Koh, a refugee from North Korea during the Korean

War, and Tines's grandmother, Alma Lee Gibbs Tines, who holds vivid memories of anti-Black discrimination and violence dating back many years. These experiences—of the artists and their families—are both the inspiration for and subject matter of this project that powerfully reclaims Koh and Tines' narratives about who they are and how they got to where they are now.

Koh regularly performs a broad range of concertos that reflect the breadth of her musical interests from traditional to contemporary. This season, she performs Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with the Pacific Symphony and Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with the Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra. She recently made her Boston Symphony Orchestra debut performing Bernstein's *Serenade* conducted by Andris Nelson. Past orchestral appearances have included performances of Bach's Violin Concerti with Orpheus Chamber Orchestra; Dvořák's Violin Concerto with the Pittsburgh Symphony led by Manfred Honeck and RAI National Symphony with James Conlon; Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 1 with the Los Angeles Philharmonic led by Bramwell Tovey and St. Louis Symphony led by Nicolas McGegan; Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with the Munich Philharmonic led by Lorin Maazel; and Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* with the Detroit Symphony led by Nicolas McGegan.

She has performed 20th-century works including Bartók and Berg concerti with the Milwaukee Symphony led by Edo de Waart; Bernstein's *Serenade* with the Minnesota Orchestra led by Juanjo Mena and The Philadelphia Orchestra led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin; Lutosławski's *Chain 2* with the New York Philharmonic led by Lorin Maazel and the Philharmonia Orchestra with Esa-Pekka Salonen; Scelsi's *Anahit* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic led by Gustavo Dudamel; and Sibelius's Violin Concerto with the New Jersey Symphony led by Xian Zhang, the São Paulo Symphonies with Marin Alsop, and the Columbus Symphony led by Rossen Milanov. An advocate for music from our current millennium, she has performed Anna Clyne's *The Seamstress* with the BBC Symphony led by Sakari Oramo, the Chicago Symphony led by Ludovic Morlot, and Cincinnati Symphony conducted by Louis Langrée; Esa-Pekka Salonen's Violin Concerto with the Houston Symphony led by Christoph Eschenbach, Nashville Symphony conducted by Giancarlo Guerrero, and Cincinnati and Gothenburg Symphonies conducted by Santtu-Matias Rouvali; and Steven Mackey's *Beautiful Passing* with the Baltimore Symphony under Marin Alsop.

Koh played the role of Einstein in the revival of Philip Glass and Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* from 2012 to 2014. She also performed with St. Vincent (Annie Clark) and S. Epatha Merkerson at the 2018 Kennedy Center Honors in a tribute to Glass. In 2021, nearly a decade after collaborating in the revival performances of Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, Koh

reunited with director Robert Wilson and choreographer Lucinda Childs for a new work, *Six Solo*, that brings to life Bach's sonatas and partitas with theatrical elements and dance. Conceived by Koh and Wilson, the new work has Koh performing all six of Bach's Partitas and Sonatas—typically performed alone on stage—with dancers and Childs. *Six Solo* premiered at the Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière as part of the Festival d'Automne à Paris. Koh also performed live improvisation as part of a world premiere dance, *Breath of the Beast, part 1*, by acclaimed American choreographer Stephen Petronio, celebrating his company's 40th anniversary.

Koh brings the same sense of adventure and brilliant musicianship to her recordings as she does to her live performances. She has recorded more than a dozen albums with Chicago-based Cedille Records, including her Grammy Award-winning *Alone Together* album. Her *Bach & Beyond* recording series, originally released by Cedille Records in three installments (2012, 2015, and 2020), was released as a three-disc box set in September 2021. These recordings explore the history of the solo violin repertoire from Bach's Six Sonatas and Partitas to the music of 20th- and 21st-century composers, including new commissions from Missy Mazzoli (*Dissolve, O My Heart*) and John Harbison (*For Violin Alone*). The collection also includes the world-premiere recording of Kaija Saariaho's *Frisés*, as well as works by Berio, Bartók, and Ysaÿe. Koh first launched *Bach & Beyond* as a three-part recital series in 2009 and she continues to perform these programs regularly. The *Bach & Beyond* recordings have received widespread critical acclaim, with the *Chicago Tribune* describing them as an “epic traversal of solo violin repertoire” and “a monumental achievement.”

Other recordings for the label in recent years include 2019's *Limitless*, on which leading composer-performers—including Lisa Bielawa, Vijay Iyer, Missy Mazzoli, Qasim Naqvi, Tyshawn Sorey, Wang Lu, Nina C. Young, and Du Yun—perform duo compositions with Koh that explore the artistic relationship between composer and performer, and a 2018 collection of works by Kaija Saariaho, whose music she has long championed and with whom she has closely collaborated. Titled *Saariaho X Koh*, the album includes the chamber version of the violin concerto *Graal Théâtre* with the Curtis Chamber Orchestra; *Cloud Trio* with violist Hsin-Yun Huang and cellist Wilhelmina Smith; *Tocar* with pianist Nicolas Hodges; *Aure* with cellist Anssi Karttunen, with whom she premiered the violin and cello version in 2015; and *Light and Matter* with both Hodges and Karttunen, with whom she performed the French premiere in 2017.

Her discography on Cedille Records also includes *Tchaikovsky: Complete Works for Violin and Orchestra* with the Odense Symphony Orchestra conducted by Alexander Vedernikov; *Two x*

Four in collaboration with her former teacher, violinist Jaime Laredo, and featuring double violin concerti by Bach, Philip Glass, and new commissions from Anna Clyne and David Ludwig; *Signs, Games + Messages*, a recording of violin and piano works by Janáček, Bartók, and Kurtág with Shai Wosner; *Rhapsodic Musings: 21st Century Works for Solo Violin*; the Grammy-nominated *String Poetic*, featuring the world premiere of Jennifer Higdon’s eponymous work, performed with pianist Reiko Uchida; Schumann’s complete violin sonatas, also with Ms. Uchida; *Portraits* with the Grant Park Orchestra under conductor Carlos Kalmar with concerti by Szymanowski, Martinů, and Bartók; *Violin Fantasies*, fantasies for violin and piano by Schubert, Schumann, Schoenberg, and saxophonist Ornette Coleman, again with Uchida; and Koh’s first Cedille album, from 2002, *Solo Chaconnes*, an earlier reading of Bach’s Second Partita coupled with chaconnes by Richard Barth and Max Reger. She is also the featured soloist on a recording of Higdon’s *The Singing Rooms* with the Atlanta Symphony led by Robert Spano for Telarc.

Koh is not only active in the concert hall and recording studio, but also as a lecturer, teacher, and curator. She has been on faculty at the Mannes School of Music since 2018 and previously held residencies at Brown, Cornell, Duke, and Tulane Universities, as well as at the Curtis Institute of Music, Oberlin Conservatory and College, and at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She was the keynote speaker for the Royal College of Music’s 2020 “Orchestrating Isolation” conference and the League of American Orchestras’ 2018 annual conference. This season, she will be in residence at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she received an honorary doctorate in 2022, and at Harvard and Dartmouth University.

Koh is the Founder and Artistic Director of ARCO Collaborative, an artist-driven nonprofit that commissions, develops, and produces new musical works that highlight artists of color and women composers in collaborations that bring forth stories previously unheard in Western art forms. She is also a member of Composers Now’s Distinguished Mentors Council and the board of the League of American Orchestras.

Born in Chicago of Korean parents, Koh began playing the violin by chance, choosing the instrument in a Suzuki-method program only because spaces for cello and piano had been filled. She made her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age 11. She was *Musical America’s* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year and has also been recently recognized as a Virtuoso Award honoree by Concert Artists Guild in 2020 and “A Force of Nature” by the American Composers Orchestra in 2019. She performed for former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama and former First Lady of South Korea Kim Yoon-ok in 2011. She was a top prize winner at Moscow’s

International Tchaikovsky Competition, winner of the Concert Artists Guild Competition, and a recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from Oberlin College and studied at the Curtis Institute, where she worked extensively with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir. For further information, visit jenniferkoh.com.