

# Strad

## THE STRAD'S PICK OF UP-AND-COMING MAKERS AND MUSICIANS



Launch Pad

**AT THE AGE OF THREE JESSICA LEE HAD ONLY JUST STARTED** learning the violin in Richmond, Virginia, when she had her first taste of fame as a musician. A photograph of her in her teacher's studio was published in *Life* magazine and she was inundated with requests to appear on TV. 'My parents don't have musical backgrounds – my father is a scientist while my mother is a day-care centre worker – and they were a little freaked out by the craziness of it all,' she explains. But music was to become her life. When she was eleven she performed Mozart's Third Violin Concerto with the Richmond Symphony and at just 14 years of age she began studying at the Curtis Institute of Music. She completed a Master's degree at the Juilliard School in 2003 and took first prize in the Concert Artists Guild competition two years later.

Now based in New York, Lee returned to her home town in April, playing with the Richmond Symphony for the first time in a decade. 'In the orchestra were many members from my first performance with it as well as a number of my Curtis classmates,' she enthuses. On 17 June she makes her debut at Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium, performing a Beethoven sonata and a work by Kaija Saariaho. Her career highlights so far have all included Beethoven and she feels that 'it's his voice, more so than with any other composer, that expresses what lies within me'. Her Weill Hall recital debut in 2005 included another of his sonatas, while his Concerto featured in her Alice Tully Hall concerto debut last year – in a concert where her teacher mistook the violin she played on, a 2005 instrument by Michigan-based maker Feng Jiang, for a Stradivari (she had access to both for the concert).

But Lee doesn't shy away from chamber music. In 2006 she became second violinist in the Johannes Quartet, which includes principals from major American orchestras. She's the youngest of the group but she doesn't feel it: 'We share a background: we're alumni of Curtis and the Marlboro Festival.' Lee believes her studies with Wei-Gang Li of the Shanghai Quartet from age seven to fourteen influenced her outlook on ensemble-playing and she wants to continue to have a multi-faceted career: 'When I haven't been a soloist or a chamber musician for a while and then I come back to it, it's like, "Oh, I missed it so much."'

Cecilia Leung

**BORN** Richmond, Virginia, USA, 1983

**TEACHERS** Wei-Gang Li, Ida Kavafian, Robert Mann

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The Strad: <https://www.wdis.co.uk/websubs/NFM/STR/page0.php>