

Midori stresses the importance of being ‘a citizen of the world’

October 04, 2022 [Kyle MacMillan](#) 5 min read



More than 35 years ago, no budding star burned brighter than [Midori](#).

At just 14 years old, the Japanese-American violinist stunned onlookers with what would have been an extraordinary display of sangfroid for an artist of any age. In an intense performance of Leonard Bernstein’s Serenade with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood, [she broke her E string](#) during the fifth movement and deftly exchanged violins with the concertmaster. ’

Then the same thing happened again, and she again carried off the exchange and managed to keep playing through it all unfazed. She was spotlighted two days later on the [front page of the New York Times](#) and became an instant superstar.

“The topic of the 1986 Tanglewood performance has always been coming back to me,” said Midori, who will join Jean-Yves Thibaudet for a duo recital Oct. 23, as part of the Symphony Center Presents Chamber Music series. “It’s always been talked about, and because I’m so often reminded of it, I sometimes forget that it has already been 35 years, and yet at the same time I think about how the world has changed since then.”

Today, Midori’s overt fame has somewhat dimmed as other dazzling talents have emerged in the violin world, but her stature in classical music and the larger arts world has only grown. That became clear when the violinist became one of the youngest artists ever to be honored at the Kennedy Center Honors.

“This was at a time when we were just able to come back into in-person performances, and it was just a special moment to be in D.C. at the Kennedy Center, to be witnessing all this as it unfolded,” she said. “I think classical music is very much a part of our cultural landscape, and therefore, it absolutely should have representation in national cultural events of this kind.”

Now 51, Midori, too, is one of the most talented violinists of her generation, and much of her time is spent on work offstage. But rather than fundraising and advocacy, she has devoted herself to musical education and outreach, working tirelessly across a variety of platforms, including several that she founded. “Interacting with young people has been so pleasurable, so inspiring, I can’t imagine my life without this component of my career,” she said.

She holds the Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and regularly gives master classes and serves a guest faculty member at schools and other venues in the United States and abroad.

Perhaps more critical are her less traditional ventures, such as [Midori & Friends](#), which she founded in 1992, and [Music Sharing](#). The former offers an ever-evolving range of musical programs with more than 75 public schools across New York City, and the latter strives to bring classical and traditional music to the children of Japan through visiting concerts and other offerings.

Another such venture is the Orchestra Residencies Program, which the violinist founded in 2004 as a way to support youth orchestras. She typically spends five to seven days at time with each participating ensemble, undertaking master classes, workshops, performances, and question-and-answer sessions.

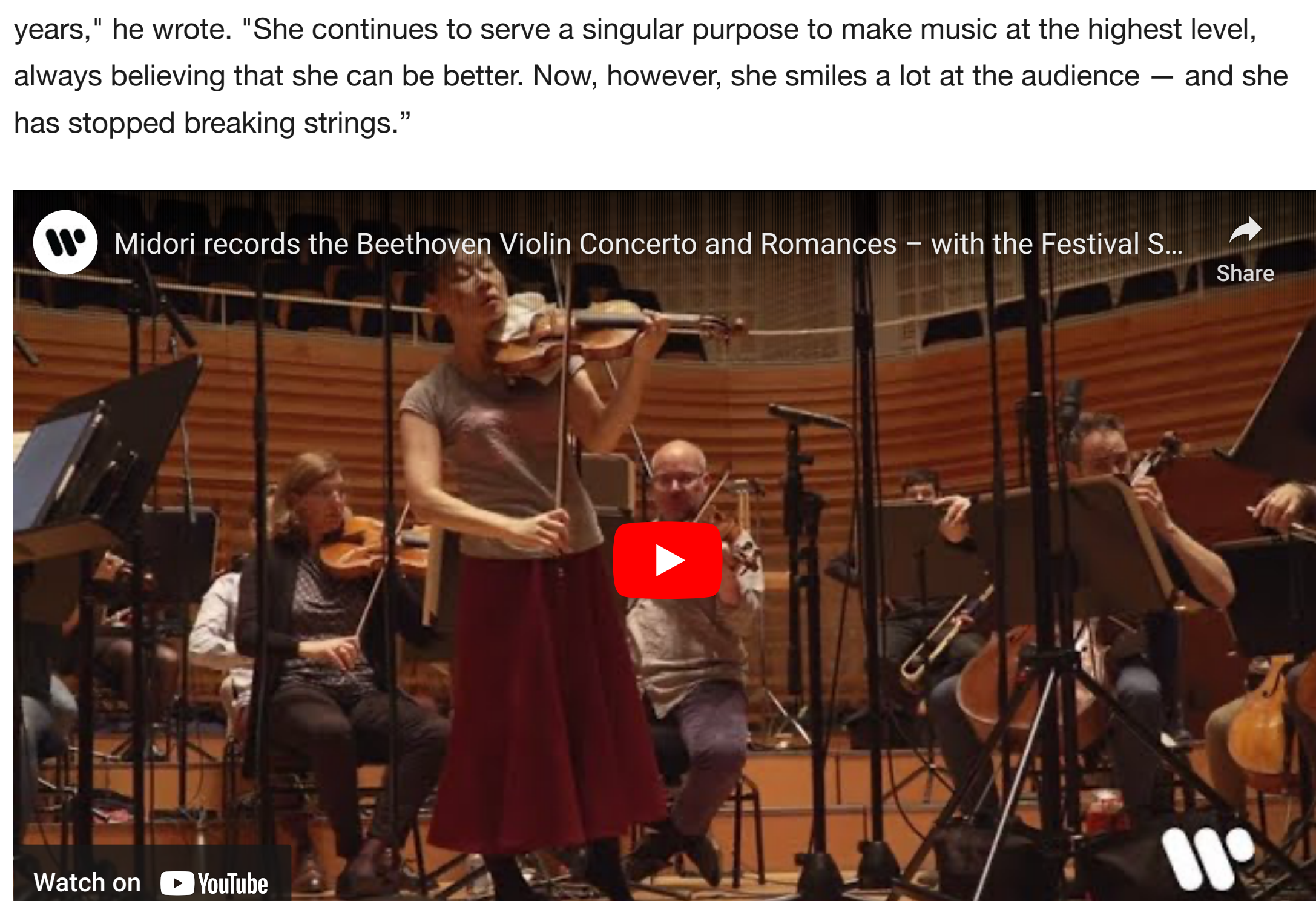
But as much work as Midori does behind the scenes, it is her performances that most classical fans see and hear, and she has long been a powerful presence on stage and recordings. Although the violinist was technically dazzling right from the beginning, she has also strived to have something to say and to inhabit the music.

“I’ve always tried to be sincere, to be truthful, to be able to really deliver the music that the composers have given us and to be as honest as possible,” she said, “I think this desire has never changed. It was there when I was 10. And I carry it as a banner, so to say, today.”

Like any performer, it is impossible for Midori to be objective about her own growth as an artist, but she feels she brings more layered meaning to her interpretations now — depth that comes with living life and growing older.

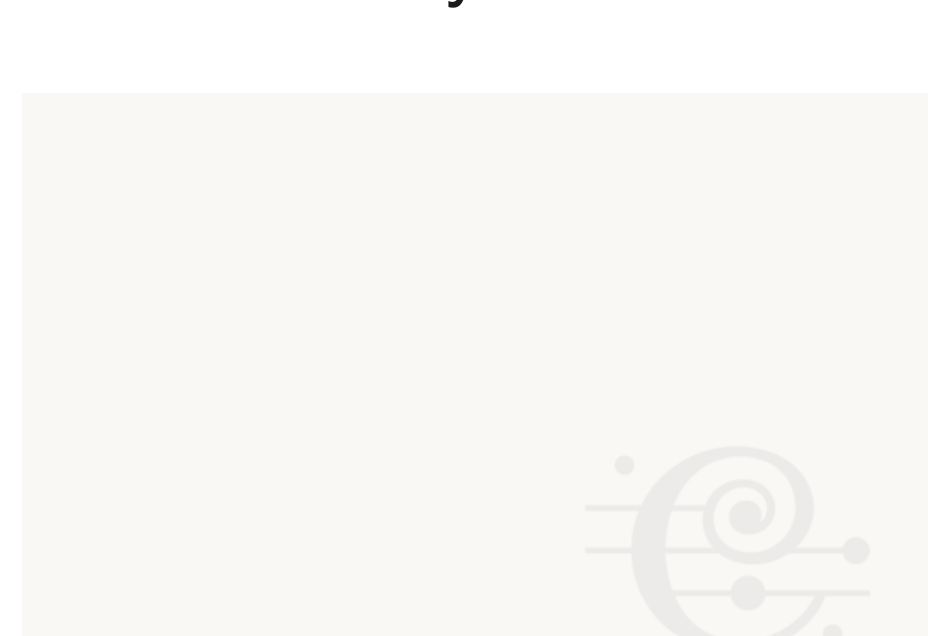
Conductor Leonard Slatkin, who took her on a Japanese tour with the St. Louis Symphony when she was still a teenager and led her first recording in 1987, wrote a tribute to Midori for the Kennedy Center Honors. He called her “one of the world’s leading pedagogues of aspiring professionals” and praised the consistently superior quality of her musicianship.

“As she approaches the half-century mark, she retains the youthful fervor that defined those early years,” he wrote. “She continues to serve a singular purpose to make music at the highest level, always believing that she can be better. Now, however, she smiles a lot at the audience — and she has stopped breaking strings.”



[Kyle MacMillan](#)
The former classical music critic of the Denver Post, Kyle MacMillan is a Chicago-based arts journalist.

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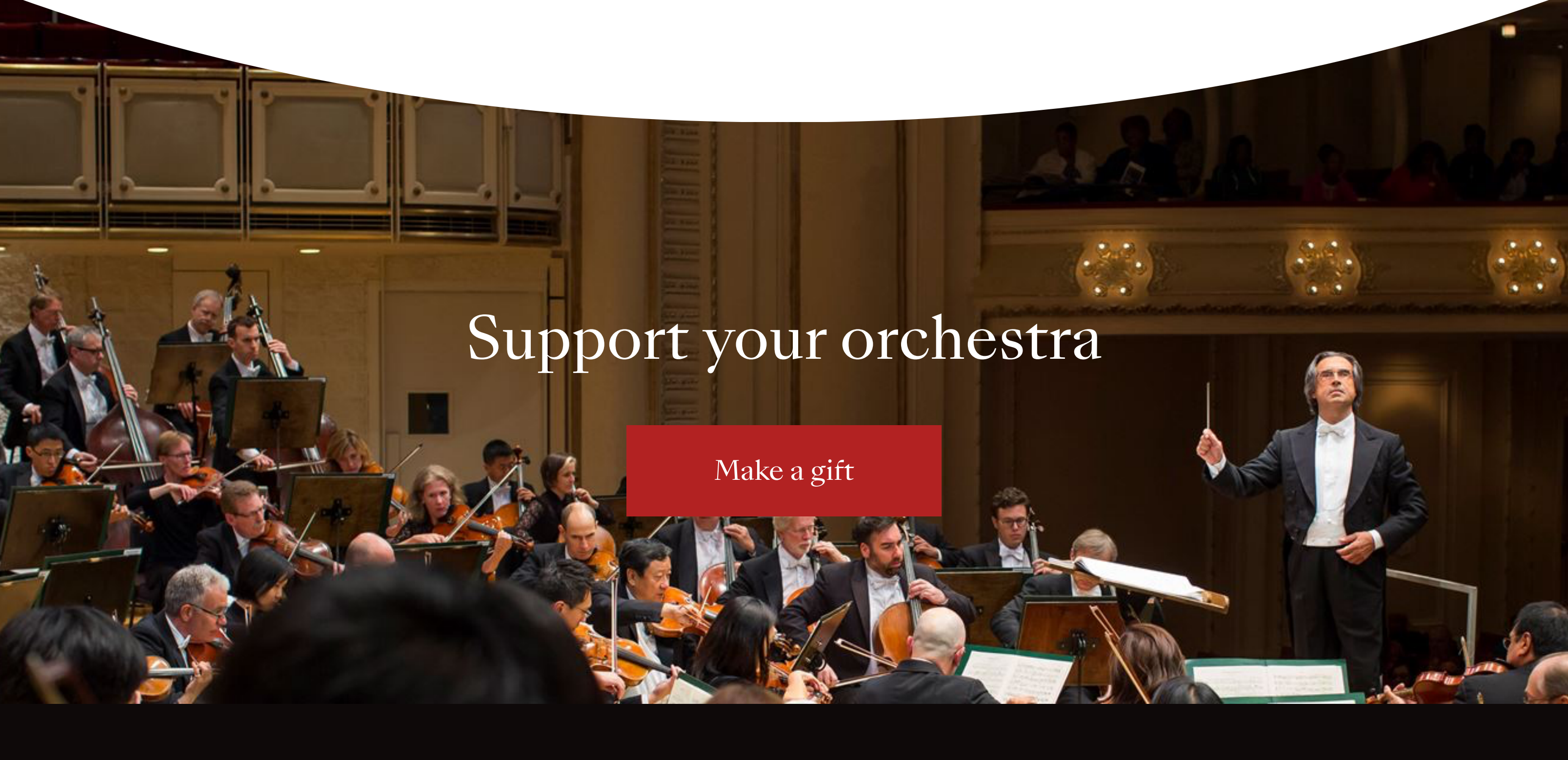
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