

MEETING HER MATCH

Zlata Brouwer had to wait
to buy the instrument of
her dreams

By Cliff Hall

Once in a great while, an instrument comes along that really complements the player. Zlata Brouwer, a chipper yet shy violinist from the Netherlands with a huge YouTube following, met her match when the grandson of a player asked her advice about selling the violin he'd inherited. "Sometimes you don't find an instrument, but an instrument finds you, and this was the case for me," wrote Brouwer on her web page. She didn't have the funds for it at the time, and so it sat unsold for three years. "The violin just remained there. I had some money issues in those years: I worked seven days a week but could hardly pay my bills. I didn't even think about buying this violin . . . I didn't think about buying anything actually. I was just trying to survive. Dark days."

After a sudden influx of new students, she finally put in a bid and was delighted when the owner accepted it. Although the instrument needed some time on her luthier's bench, Brouwer couldn't be happier with the end result. "I knew this violin was for me, the violin knew it was for me, the owner knew it, and the universe made it possible," she says.



Things seem to be going well professionally for Brouwer these days—a far cry from the dark days she describes. She launched her website, Violin Lounge, in 2013, and has since amassed a wide and enthusiastic audience. The idea of Violin Lounge appealed to Brouwer because she “loved to serve violin players outside of my in-person lessons,” she says. “I was following blogs and YouTube channels on various topics and decided to make my own about all things violin. I love writing and making videos. Violin Lounge has about 50,000 views per month now, and my YouTube channel has about 250,000 views per month. I recently hit ten million views, which is just as wonderful as it is intimidating.”

Tell me about your primary instrument.

My violin was made in Germany around 1840 by an unknown maker.

What do you know about this instrument's history?

I bought it from the grandson of the previous player, who was a first violinist in the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in the time of Mengelberg. Before I started playing it, it had been silent for about half a century and wasn't in a good state.

How did you come to play it?

The grandson of the previous owner asked my advice on selling the violin he inherited. I ended up buying it for myself.

What first drew you to it, and how did you know it was the right fit?

For some reason, I was drawn to it when the previous owner showed it to me. It wasn't in a good state and didn't sound that good. I played it a little for a while, and the instrument started opening up and sounding better. Then I decided to buy it for myself and have a violin maker restore it.

What gift does your instrument bring to your playing that can't be found in any other instrument?

It has a full and warm sound with great response and enough brightness. I mainly play together with my pianist, Mari, and the violin pairs well with piano.

What is your instrument's personality and temperament like?

It's a bold instrument that likes attention. Just as it didn't sound good after half a century of silence, if I don't play for a few days, the sound is a bit off, and the old guy needs a warm up (or I need it: ha!).

Does it remind you of anyone or anything?

The “vintage” sound gives me the feel of old recordings.

What is its greatest strength?

The bold vintage sound—and people always love his looks.

“
It's a bold
instrument
that likes
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—Zlata Brouwer

”

What are some of its limitations?

He has some nasty wolf tones. The adjustments that reduce them also make it sound less bold. The setup is really a compromise.

If given the ability, what would your instrument say to you if you sat down for tea (or any beverage of your choice)?

Please practice more! And I would love to hear all his stories from his almost-200-year life.

What are your plans for Violin Lounge's future?

At the moment I'm launching an in-depth online course titled Master the Bow

about the *40 Variations, Op. 3*, by Ševčík, and later this year on *The Art of Bowing* by Tartini. I think they are the best études out there on different bowing techniques, but a lot of players (including myself in the past) just scratch the surface and don't discover the depths and endless progress you can make from them.

Currently, I have five children under the age of five, and I've been doing lots of early childhood music and violin-teacher training with Colourstrings Scotland, Stringosaurus, and Wee Violin. I will use my platform to serve children and their parents in between lessons with helpful articles, product reviews, and videos. I already made a few videos featuring my four-year-old violin-playing daughter.

On your website, you mentioned that you have given up performing in favor of teaching. Do you miss performing?

It actually started at my first violin lesson: I came back home and said I wanted to be a violin teacher. Performing was something I started to enjoy later on. Also, I've struggled with performance anxiety.

What led to that decision?

I had five kids in a little over three years (amongst them two sets of twins). With my busy family life, I have to deliberately choose what I want to do (and what not to do) in terms of work. I mainly focus on writing articles, making videos, and teaching my little ones music: violin and piano. From time to time, I perform and record with my pianist, Mari, and currently I'm happy with that.

OTHER GEAR

Strings Pirastro Evah Pirazzi Gold with a No. 1 soft E string

Bows Arcus S9 (round) and CodaBow Marquise

Case Gewa Air 1.7 in glossy black

Rosin Pirastro Evah Pirazzi Gold

Additional Gear VLM Augustin Diamond shoulder rest