



Bieler

## Alumna Ida Bieler: Back to her roots

By Lauren Whitaker

Ida Bieler was 3 years old the first time she heard a violin. She was living in a log cabin in the Virginia mountains, listening to her father's records, and she was instantly in love.

"I was fascinated by the violin. I could not hear enough," she said, recalling that her lifelong passion began with her father's recording of *Scheherazade*, the Russian symphonic poem based on *One Thousand and One Nights*. "I wanted to be part of this music, to become this musical Scheherazade," Bieler says.

Instead, she became a virtuoso violinist, the first female concertmaster of a major European orchestra, an acclaimed chamber musician, dedicated music educator, and the first artistic director of the new Chrysalis Chamber Music Institute at UNCSCA.

Bieler, who joined the School of Music faculty in 2013, says teaching at UNCSCA feels a lot like coming home. The career that has taken her around the world began some 50 years ago, when she became a member of the school's first high school freshman class.

"I was so happy to be here," she said. "I knew this to be my first great opportunity, my great chance to become a musician."

Bieler fondly recalls her audition with violinist Marc Gottlieb in the School of Music. "It was amusing," she recalled. "Almost certainly for him, albeit less so, for me."

When Gottlieb's solemn request that she perform a scale and étude was met with a desperate blankness from Bieler, he asked, "Well, whatever then, can you play?"

"I will never forget it," Bieler said. "I guess I did all right."

Bieler spent three years as a high school student at the School of the Arts, but left shortly after the death of founding President Vittorio Giannini. (Her sister, Suri Bieler, graduated in 1971 and went on to run one of the largest prop rental companies on the East Coast and serve on the School of the Arts' Board of Trustees.) At Gottlieb's urging, Ida Bieler headed for New York to study in Juilliard's preparatory department for a year.





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She earned two degrees from Juilliard and stayed in New York, performing and teaching to earn a living. "In the early years, I felt it most important to study, work, and be in the musical world of New York," she said. "But after I'd had the privilege to work and study there, I felt ever more artistic questions growing, ever more curiosity and a need for new and diverse experiences and musical impulses."

So she headed to Europe, and "a whole new world opened up."

Bieler has won international competitions on three continents and has performed and been a frequent guest artist in major international festivals in Germany, Austria, Denmark, France, Scandinavia and the United States, including Puerto Rico.

As a chamber musician, Bieler was a member of Germany's legendary Melos String Quartet for 12 years and has performed and recorded with the Ensemble Villa Musica, the Heine

Quartet and the highly acclaimed Xyrión Piano Trio. In 2009 she founded the Robert Schumann Ensemble Düsseldorf.

Back in the early '80s, though, she was struggling to establish herself in Europe. She applied for concertmaster positions throughout Europe, to no avail. She recalls one explicit letter of rejection that illustrated common attitudes at that time. It was from a chamber orchestra in Switzerland, and it read, "Thank you for your application and fine résumé, but unfortunately, we do not want a woman leading as concertmaster. Please forgive our attitude and decision."

She persevered. Eventually, she auditioned, initially uninvited, for a first violin position for the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne, receiving unanimous accolades and an offer of the position of concertmaster.

With that, Bieler became the first female concertmaster of a major European orchestra, a post she held for five years.

Despite that achievement, she does not consider herself a pioneer. "It felt like a battle," she said. "It is heartwarming to know this situation does not exist today. Now, there is greater effort taken by orchestras to make careful selections based on qualifications alone."

That is no doubt music to the ears of some of Bieler's students, including Lucia Kobza of Switzerland, winner of the UNCSCA Concerto Competition and concertmaster of the UNCSCA Symphony Orchestra. The recent recipient of a Master of Music, Kobza is a member of the Gianinni String Quartet, Chrysalis Institute's first ensemble fellows. She has returned to pursue a Professional Artist Certificate.

Kobza met Bieler at a festival in Germany and was invited to attend UNCSCA as a graduate student. She has studied with Bieler for two years and says she has not faced the gender discrimination that her role model experienced.

"I don't think that happens today," Kobza said. "Ida helped that situation, definitely. She is profoundly accomplished in so many areas – chamber music, orchestra, teaching. She embodies the whole palette of a musical career."

Since 1988, Bieler has been professor of violin and chamber music at major music schools in Germany, England and Austria. She has led international master classes in Switzerland, France, Italy, Slovenia, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, South America, Canada and the United States.

Teaching, she says, never gets boring.

"I love the problem-solving; the unlocking and discovering of hidden talents and sensitivity in a person; helping young people to refine their own finest abilities and gifts; guiding them through manifold passages to becoming the individuals and musicians they truly are and can be. Doing these things is my highest reward in my teaching experience."

Violinist Kevin Murphy, a rising senior from Wake Forest, N.C., has studied with Bieler for three years, and says she has a "brilliant mind for teaching" and a natural, organic approach to the violin.

"The sensitivity, thoughtfulness and intuition Ida Bieler demonstrates in private lessons carry well into chamber music – a nuanced art form that depends on a delicate synergy between often (highly) contrasting and individual personalities," he said.

And the thing she shares best? "The wonderful education that started at the School of the Arts, and the experience I gained through all of the remarkable people I have had in my life."

Bieler is happy to be back where she started. "It is gratifying to see my learning and love of music reflected in others," she said. "That is what makes me very, very happy."