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Mark O'Connor explores possibilities of violin

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There won't be any walls built on Mark O'Connor's borders

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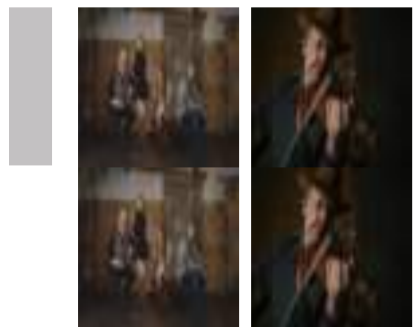
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The O'Connor Band includes, from left, Mark O'Connor, Maggie O'Connor, Kate Lee and Forrest O'Connor. John David Pittman photos



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In Concert

What: Cape Cod Symphony; Jung-Ho Pak conducting

Featuring: The O'Connor Band Featuring Mark O'Connor

When: 7:30 p.m. Sept. 10 and 3 p.m. Sept. 11 ...

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that was 40 years ago. He's been the Country Music Association musician of the year six times.

He's been in several high-profile touring ensembles: the Dave Grisman Quintet, Strength in Numbers, the Dregs, and now the O'Connor Band, whose fellow members will join him at the Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center.

Apart from his performing legacy, his work as a composer stretches into all forms of music. He's written string quartets, concertos and piano trios, with performers like Yo-Yo Ma, Renée Fleming and the Eroica Trio recording those works to great acclaim.

Then there's his O'Connor Method. Dissatisfied with the options for young American violinists – who basically need to find an orchestra job or give up the idea of playing professionally – O'Connor developed a wide-ranging violin pedagogy, which teaches fiddlers all sorts of styles, and opens the possibility of various professional collaborations.

O'Connor, 55, will perform one of his most unusual works – the Improvised Violin Concerto – with the orchestra, and then will bring out the other members of the O'Connor Band – son Forrest and Forrest's fiancée Kate Lee, along with Mark's wife, Maggie – for selections from "Coming Home." This first family band release came out in August on Rounder Records and immediately went to No. 1 on the Billboard bluegrass charts.

The Improvised Violin Concerto shows O'Connor off at his best.

"I've been improvising since I was kid," he says. "If I've played this 20 times, the other 19 have

By Keith Powers
Contributing writer

Posted Aug. 25, 2016 at 3:51 PM

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There won't be any walls built on Mark O'Connor's borders.

The American violinist and composer, who comes to the Cape on Sept. 10 and 11 to help open the Cape Symphony Orchestra season, holds multiple passports. He was the youngest person ever to win the Grand Master Fiddler Championship –

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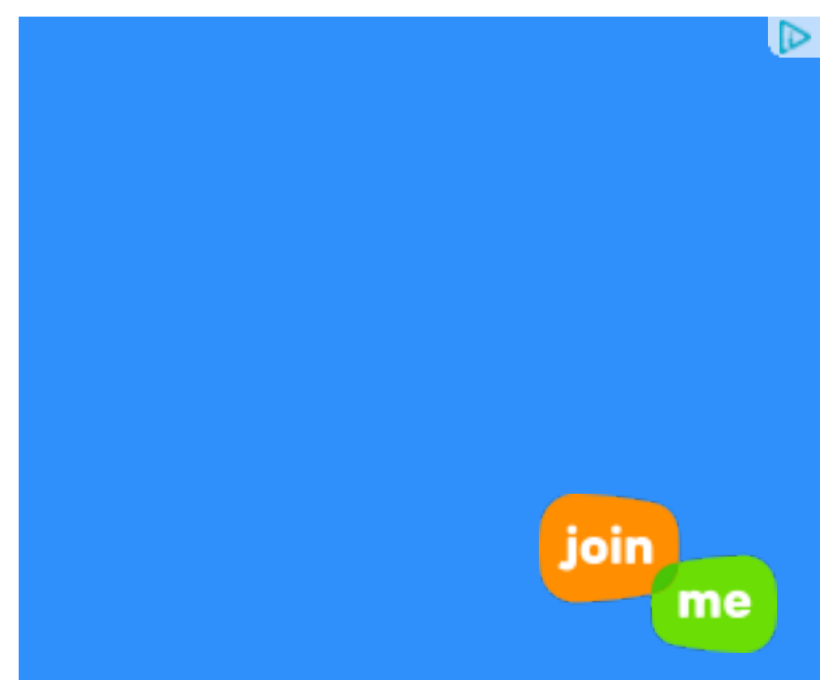
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been completely different measure to measure each time. Every performance is brand new."

The work is fascinating – five movements, with the orchestral part completely written out, and the soloist's part having only suggested moods and specific keys indicated. O'Connor will perform the fifth movement, "Faith," with the CSO.

"I do mean everything is improvised," he insists. "I play amplified, and so I can even change the dynamic ranges. If the orchestra is playing mezzo-forte in measure 55, I can play loudly acoustically, or softly, or loudly electronically, or softly."

So far, he's the only one to perform the work. "I haven't let it out into the world," he says of the concerto, which he debuted on Boston's Symphony Hall stage with the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra in 2011. "I'd actually challenge my violin colleagues to write their own concertos first."

Taking the stage with family is also an obvious point of pride. "We decided about a year ago to make the band a priority," he says. "Forrest went to Harvard, and when he graduated he told me he wanted to move to Nashville and get serious about his music.

"It's a lot of work behind the scenes to make things happen – finding an agency, getting a label and recording an album. The fact that it went No. 1 right away tells me people like it."

During O'Connor's stay on the Cape, there will also be a free performance/demonstration of the O'Connor Method at 1 p.m. Sept. 10 in Knight Auditorium at Barnstable High School.

"The method introduces creativity right from the beginning of the lesson plan," he says. "It takes the best out of American music and makes it work for students. The violin has a special history in America, and we want string players to have thriving professional opportunities."

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