

2021 GMTA TEACHER OF THE YEAR Sonja Foster



As the recipient of GMTA Teacher of the Year, Sonja wishes to give a special tribute to her remarkable parents, Lyle and Ruth Foster, who made everything possible for her career in music; to her late brother, Lawrence Foster, a world renown concert cellist who constantly inspired her; and to her husband of 32 years, Frank Allen, who gives her his unwavering encouragement.

Sonja Foster is a distinguished American violinist and pedagogue who is an alumna of The Curtis Institute and The Juilliard School, having studied for seven years with the legendary Ivan Galamian. Hailed for her “fiery virtuosity” and “luscious singing tone,” Sonja has performed extensively across the US in recital and as a soloist with orchestra. She soloed regularly with her late brother, Lawrence Foster.

Maestro Mehli Mehta, father of Zubin Mehta, featured Sonja in her Los Angeles debut with his orchestra performing the Sibelius Concerto. The Atlanta Music Club sponsored Sonja’s Atlanta debut at the Woodruff Arts Center with Edith Karney Schiff at the piano. She performed the Bruch Concerto with the Sandy Springs Chamber Orchestra (now the Georgia Philharmonic),with Maestro Charles Schiff conducting. She has also been featured in recital for the Pro-Mozart Series, UGA, GPTV, the High Museum of Art, Dekalb College and Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston where she world premiered a sonata by Curtis Bryant, with Cary Lewis, piano. In addition, she has appeared across America in many concerts and on television.

Dr. Robert Schuller wrote about her in his book, “Life’s Not Fair But God is Good” after she was interviewed by him and performed at his church in California which was broadcast on world wide TV.

Born in Chicago, she began piano at the age of five and violin at the age of seven. She made her debut with orchestra at age 12 and won many competitions. She was featured on the NBC-Chicago, “Artists Showcase” TV program with Lous Sudler, President of Chicago Symphony at age 14. She soloed with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago in Orchestra Hall at age 15.

Ivan Galamian chose Sonja to be in his student at age 15 at The Curtis Institute where she remained three years. She continued with him at The Juilliard School, completing her degree.

Upon graduating from Juilliard, she combined teaching with her solo performing. As a pedagogue, Sonja was on the faculty at Trinity College, Il. and Wheaton College, Il, where she was Head of Strings until her move to Atlanta. She opened her studio in Atlanta for exceptionally gifted pre- college violin and violists. Many of her students have gone on to international careers including Kristen Lee, Concert violinist; Joel Link, First Violin of the Dover Quartet and First Place Winner of the Menuhin Competition; and Phillip, Janet and Timothy Ying of the Grammy winning Ying Quartet. Too many to mention have gone on to significant careers in music and other disciplines which are making a difference in the world. You can read more at sonjafoster.com.

Two of her students have won 1st place at MTNA National Competition and three others have won 2nd and 3rd place. Many have won the state of Georgia for MTNA and several in Florida. Others have won most every competition in the Southeast.

Her students have been accepted at every major music school in America including The Juilliard School and The Curtis Institute, many on full scholarship.

Sonja has given Master Classes at Vanderbilt University, Utah State University, Pacific Union College and Columbus State University to name a few.

Sonja continues to teach highly gifted violinists from Georgia, Florida, North Carolina and Tennessee both in person and by Zoom.

In 2016, Governor Nathan Kemp of Georgia gave her a written Commendation for her work with students. Senator Johnny Isaakson wrote to her recognizing her work with talented students in Georgia.

**Georgia Music Teachers Association
Teacher of the Year, 2021 – Sonja Foster
Teaching Tips**

My love for teaching began after graduation when I combined my solo performing with teaching! What a wonderful adventure it is to have success in introducing young people to the joy of music! I love it because

my priority is to concentrate on the student first and teaching violin second. Each student is unique to me and I approach them in specialized manner.

In these teaching tips, I am going to weave in my core values and principals that have worked for me.

This is the main thing for me: intensely love music, perform when you can and immerse yourself in finding ways to grow young artists!

As Stephen Covey said "Begin with the end in mind". When I audition a prospective student, I have an immediate picture of what they are capable of long range. Everything I assign and do from then on is based on this. However, that being said, it is kept inside of me. I am careful to never give any student an expectation of being famous in the future on their instrument. I have seen first hand how doing that only brings crushing disappointment to the student. Instead, I tell them if they want a career in music, then learn how to do everything on their instrument: solo; perform chamber music; excel in orchestra; learn how to teach and even learn how to conduct!

In private study, I believe in only teaching the students that really want to study with me. It is these students that will be the most diligent in becoming the best they can be.

For me, lessons should be an exciting learning experience for the student. Some tell me it is the best hour of their week. To expedite that, I am always warmed up, am never tired when I teach and I am able to demonstrate whatever they are learning. I practice every day.

I strongly believe that the lesson should be a safe place, a place where the student feels important, heard, understood, and encouraged. It is here that their creativity is nourished. Here they know they

will get the unvarnished truth from me in a wholesome way. They know that I will carefully and thoroughly guide them.

I believe in using praise honestly and wisely. I help my students discover that when I praise them, it means that they have done excellent practicing. I tell them to use that praise to guide their practice for the next week. When there are problems in the lesson, I analyze each problem individually and give them specific, workable solutions. For instance, any and all notes that are played out of tune are identified and corrected every time. This has helped my students develop an incredible sense of pitch quickly. I feel strongly about never using sweeping, generalized criticisms of a student or their playing. It is very destructive. For example: saying "that is all out of tune" or "You are not playing well today" will hinder the growth of any student.

I believe in hearing everything I assign each week (without going over the lesson time). This keeps the student's muscle memory in the best shape.

I love to teach students how to perform by memory all the repertoire they learn. It is one of my requirements before finishing repertoire. When an actual recital or public performance is not possible, I have them make a recording as a performance.

I encourage all of my students to hear live concerts each year! It is a profound and often life changing opportunity to hear the great artists in person.

For my colleagues: Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way* wrote "Take care of your Artist" meaning the artist inside of you! This has had a strong impact on me. We can get depleted and need a reset. Find those activities that refresh you daily! Why? Because what we do as teachers is some of the most important work in the world!