

# Jeremy Constant

For This High-Flying Artist, There's Music in the Air

A violin virtuoso who knows his way around a Stradivarius, Jeremy Constant at 6 fell in love – with Tchaikovsky. The concertos his father would spin on the turntable “had a sound that just grabbed me,” he says. At 30-something the virtuoso was swept off his feet again – by flying. “It’s awesome!” he enthuses, thrilled to pilot a 1965 Aylon Air Coupe that, he admits, “just mushes!”

Passion indeed informs the life of this artist whose grand romance with music, whose fervent fancy for aviation, tunes his days to the key of delight – with lots of thrill the melody. The harmony? Creative joy.

“It’s all a lot of fun!” says Constant, who is assistant concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony. Fun it may be but critics see other things in the virtuoso’s m.o. “Absolutely stunning!” one says of his musical shaping. “A melodic raconteur,” says another of his artistry. “A model of intelligent virtuosity” who, raves a third, “goes straight to the heart of the music.” As a musician Constant indeed has that something. Always has.

From the time the Waterloo, Canada native felt Tchaikovsky calling he has followed his muse along a trajectory of success where guts and grit have been the least of his prodigious gifts. Turned away from his first violin teacher for being too young, the pint-size virtuoso put himself in a holding pattern by learning piano. When he was cleared to land in his life’s work – the violin – he took off, eventually soaring past all obstacles, including the “reality checks”

of his devoted parents who, worried he wasn’t being practical, urged him to study “not music” in school. And then there was the full scholarship to New York’s prestigious Julliard School of Music that he blew off after only three months. “I knew instantly it was an



unhealthy place,” he says. Constant, after all, knew there was something better, and there was: Itzhtak Perlman.

The kid who loved performing, who got a charge from competitions, many of which he won, was snapped-up by the legendary maestro and for two and a half years was one of only 10 gifted students in his Brooklyn College master class. “I was unbelievably nervous” auditioning, Constant recalls. “There I was with my turbo vibrato sounding like Glynda the Good Witch – ridiculous.” But some-

thing in the protégé convinced Perlman he was worthy and lo! how he went on to prove him not wrong. In 1979 he swept Grand Prize in Canada’s prestigious DuMaurier Competition; next California’s Carmel Bach Festival came courting. And then it wasn’t long before Constant’s talent completely won the West. The violinist joined the orchestra of the San Francisco Opera, and in 1984 the elite San Francisco Symphony. There he continues today to “bang it out” on a circa 1700 Stradivarius, the beautiful and Most High of violins. He is, he reverently admits, the instrument’s humble servant.

“If I’m very careful about listening to what it is saying,” he says, “I will get better.”

And getting better is ever a constant with Constant. Take his flying.

“Hell, yes!” he told a pilot friend in his hometown near Toronto when asked if he’d like a ride. But it wasn’t until 1996, at Oakland, that he himself took the controls. “From the get-go I wanted to learn there, because I didn’t want to be intimidated by busy airspace,” he says. “With Class B you’ll be waiting in a conga line to take off and have to travel 20 minutes just to get to a practice area...” And that sort of difficulty suits the virtuoso just fine. Except perhaps when it comes to the Air Coupe he acquired two years ago.

“I needed something stone simple I could hop in when I was out of shape and not be worried,” he says, “something to use to get back in shape.” No flaps, no pitch propeller, tricycle gear; Constant’s stall-proof little honey is



music to his (quite accomplished) ears. “The avionics are unbelievable!” he enthuses. “You’ll sink 1,000 feet a minute with complete aerilon authority. It’s awesome!”

When he’s not sinking 1,000 a minute, the 40-something Constant, who lives in Oakland with his artist wife, Sharon, finds time in his grueling concert schedule to play with his computer, garden, appreciate fine wine and build a Van’s RV7A under the tutelage of the Experimental Aircraft Assn’s flight advisor program. “When will I finish?” he laughs. “The question is, how much money do I want to throw at this plane?” and how much skill and patience does it take to impress the EAA’s tech counselor whom Constant jokes is skeptically thinking, *does the guy know how to rivet?*

Whether or not he proves to be a riv-

eting *wunderkind* likely isn’t critical. When a dashing Constant slips into the tails he has hand-tailored in Hong Kong, reverently picks-up the rare Stradivarius (only 512 are said to exist in the world), and becomes its worshipful student, he transforms into a conjurer of magic. And like the “singing powerful incredible sound going right through you” that he admired in his mentor Perlman, the flying virtuoso makes singing powerful incredible sound of his own, not only with the San Francisco Symphony, but also as concertmaster of the Marin, CA symphony and as first violin with the Navarro String Quartet. “Splendid and driven with intensity,” one exuberant critic praised of his musical mastery. “Even the silences contain ghostly eloquence.” And *that*, fellow flyers, is Constant’s song in the key of life. ✕

The violin virtuoso makes dazzling work of his Stradivarius during a S.F. Symphony performance (left); But does the guy know how to rivet? Constant with part of his Van’s RV7A (above)