

## Meg Okura – Violinist & Composer

### SHORT BIO

Praised by *The New York Times* for music of “grandiloquent beauty that transitions easily from grooves to big cascades to buoyant swing,” Tokyo-born, New York-based composer and violinist **Meg Okura** has emerged as a distinctive voice in contemporary jazz. In 2025, she marks the 20th anniversary of her Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble (PACJE) with the release of *Isaiah*, the group’s fifth album, alongside the world premiere of her *Shaon Overture (The Clock Overture)*, commissioned by the 68-piece Symphonic Jazz Orchestra as winner of the George Duke Commissioning Prize.

An acclaimed classical virtuoso from an early age, she toured internationally as soloist and concertmaster—including a Kennedy Center debut—before expanding her artistry into jazz and composition, working with Michael Brecker, Lee Konitz, Steve Swallow, Tom Harrell, David Bowie, and Pharaoh’s Daughter. Okura’s career has been recognized with many of today’s most significant honors for jazz artists, awarded by Chamber Music America, ISJAC, Jazz Road, and the Asian Cultural Council. Her recordings—including *IMA*, *Lingering* with Kevin Hays, and *NPO Trio Live at the Stone*—have received international acclaim.

### FULL BIO

Praised by *The New York Times* for music of “grandiloquent beauty that transitions easily from grooves to big cascades to buoyant swing,” Tokyo-born, New York-based composer and violinist **Meg Okura** has emerged as a distinctive voice in contemporary jazz. In 2025, she celebrates the 20th anniversary of her Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble (PACJE) with the release of *Isaiah*, the ensemble’s fifth album, alongside the world premiere of her *Shaon Overture (The Clock Overture)*, commissioned by the 68-piece Symphonic Jazz Orchestra after she was awarded the prestigious George Duke Commissioning Prize.

An acclaimed classical virtuoso from an early age, she toured internationally as soloist and concertmaster—including a Kennedy Center debut—before expanding her artistry into jazz and composition. She bridges classical and jazz with uncommon fluency, having performed with the Sirius and Scorchio Quartets—ensembles devoted to contemporary and cross-genre projects—and worked with artists such as Michael Brecker, Lee Konitz, Steve Swallow, Tom Harrell, David Bowie, and Pharaoh’s Daughter, the groundbreaking Jewish/world music group, celebrated internationally for its innovative sound, with which she has performed for over 25 years. She also received a Grammy nomination as a violinist on Argentinian jazz composer Emilio Solla’s *Second Act*.

PACJE has been her primary laboratory for two decades, appearing at Birdland, Blue Note, the Knitting Factory, Winter Jazzfest, and international festivals from Kuala Lumpur to Japan. Its repertoire includes works such as *Rice Country* (written at Copland House) and *Jubberish* (commissioned by Chamber Music America), emblematic of Okura's ongoing evolution. The ensemble's discography—*Meg Okura's PACJE* (2006), *Naima* (2010), *Music of Ryuichi Sakamoto* (2013), *IMA IMA* (2018), and now *Isaiah* (2025)—has earned wide acclaim, with *IMA IMA*'s release show at Dizzy's Club at Jazz at Lincoln Center named a *New York Times* Editor's Pick and one of *All About Jazz*'s Best Releases of the Year.

In parallel, her compositions have increasingly reached beyond her own ensemble. *Phantasmagoria* has been featured at the Grand Teton Music Festival, Florida State University Festival of New Music, and LunART Festival, and recorded on the Grammy-nominated album *Ourselves Behind Ourselves, Concealed* with Tasha Warren and Dave Eggar. Her big band composition *Silent Screams: An Anthem for the Unheard*, commissioned by the International Society of Jazz Arrangers & Composers (ISJAC), was premiered at Vanderbilt University and later performed in New York by the BMI/New York Jazz Orchestra and by the Meeting House Jazz Orchestra.

With *Shaon Overture*, commissioned for the 68-piece Symphonic Jazz Orchestra, Okura composes on the largest scale of her career. The milestone feels both inevitable and extraordinary: a symphonic palette growing out of her formative experiences as a virtuoso soloist and concertmaster, as a cutting-edge chamber musician, and through years of “on-the-job training” with jazz legends and leading composer-arrangers such as Gil Goldstein and Steve Swallow, as well as extensive work in world-music ensembles. Without ever having studied jazz or composition formally in an institution—trained only as a violin major—she has nonetheless risen to this moment, her achievements all the more remarkable as the result of experience earned on stage rather than in the classroom.

Her career has been recognized with many of today's most significant honors for jazz artists, awarded by CMA, ISJAC, Jazz Road, and the Asian Cultural Council. Her recordings also include *Lingering*, a duo album with Kevin Hays (“achingly beautiful,” *The Ear*), and *NPO Trio Live at the Stone* with Sam Newsome and Jean-Michel Pilc. Looking ahead, she will travel to Vietnam in 2026 as an Asian Cultural Council Fellow, studying the indigenous musical traditions of the H'mong and Jarai peoples, research that will further enrich her compositional voice.