

Touring Soloist Juggles Motherhood and a Cello

Kristina Reiko Cooper's road case is the one with the Baby On Board sticker

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By Christopher Roberts

Name: Kristina Reiko Cooper

Hometown: New York City

Instrument: Cello

Quote: 'Music is my first love. It wouldn't enter my mind to give that up.'

The audience came to see a soloist. The artist considers herself a soloist. The artist is billed as a soloist. But cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper found herself playing a duet, of sorts, when she took the stage for the final concert of her 2008 tour.

Cooper was traveling to promote her latest CD, *Stone and Steel* (Linus), but she was also on tour as an expectant mother, six weeks before the due date of her now nine-month-old son. She was backstage, mentally preparing for the concerto she was about to play, trying to forget the nausea that plagued her throughout her pregnancy. "I was up there, feeling nervous—being sick the whole time, I didn't practice as much—when I realized the baby was going nuts," Cooper says. "As soon as the adrenaline started kicking in, my baby starting kicking like he was being chased by a saber-toothed tiger. It was making me laugh, because you could see it making my cello bounce up and down a little bit."

Cooper sailed through the performance with no problems and, save for a six-week hiatus when she and her husband adjusted to their new roles as parents, she's been sailing through more tour dates. Cooper's spent about ten days out of each of the last six months away on tour. She and her family split time between New York and Israel, but she also performs in South America and Japan.

She travels with an entourage of sorts: baby Zack, his nanny, her 1786 William Forester cello, and all the requisite gear—three fully-packed suitcases, a laptop, formal concert gowns, bassinet, breast pump, toys, baby gym, stroller, frozen breast milk, a water sterilizer, diapers, and sanitary wipes.

There was a time when this touring artist never expected to be a mother, but traveling without her son never crossed her mind. "Especially when I'm nursing, I don't want to be thousands of miles apart," she says. "I don't want to be away for 15 minutes. I don't think I ever thought of it as an option."

But replacing her artistic career with motherhood was never an option, either. "Music is my first love," she says. "It wouldn't enter my mind to give that up in any case. It's just figuring out how to make it work."

Traveling in this manner has had its difficulties, such as the time when leery airport security officials had her open the cello case and perform to ensure it was not a weapon and then told her she'd have to open and drink from the bottles of breast milk she'd brought on board for her son to ensure they were milk and not explosives. That incident brought international media coverage.

But touring with her son has had unexpected benefits. "Being on the road can be pretty lonely," she says. "You perform, you get all the adrenaline running, you get on a high, and then you have to go back to an empty hotel room, with nothing to do but watch *Law and Order*," she says. "It's something very special and beautiful, coming back and getting to see your son."

To learn more about cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper, visit kristinareikocooper.com.

