

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Viola Concerto to Have Its World Premiere: Paul Neubauer Is the Soloist, JoAnn Falletta Will Conduct

**July 12, 2026, at the Brevard Music Festival
May 21 & 22, 2027, with the Buffalo Philharmonic**



Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (photo by Bill Keefrey), Paul Neubauer

[Ellen Taaffe Zwilich](#) has, at the age of 87, written her 18th solo concerto: a work showcasing the viola.

The first woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize in music, the very first holder of the Carnegie Hall Composer's Chair, and a composer who helped blaze a 20th-century trail in a world that seems only recently to have become equal-opportunity, Ellen has written many works for string, wind, and brass soloists and orchestra, 17 of which bear the word "concerto" in the title. Her Viola Concerto is her first for the instrument.

The work will have its world premiere performed by soloist Paul Neubauer and conductor JoAnn Falletta leading the [Brevard Sinfonia on July 12](#) as part of the Brevard Music Center's 2026 summer festival (Brevard, NC). Paul Neubauer will also perform the concerto with JoAnn Falletta and the [Buffalo Philharmonic on May 21 and 22, 2027](#).

To quote from a note on the concerto, “Zwilich has long approached instruments as individual creatures, each with its own personality and its own way of wanting to be heard. The viola has been a particular object of affection: her Third Symphony featured the viola section prominently, and soloist Paul Neubauer performed in that very ensemble [at its premiere, by the New York Philharmonic]. This Viola Concerto is, in her words, a piece about love: love for the instrument, and the desire to let it be fully, wholly itself.”

As Ellen told San Francisco Classical Voice in 2021, “We don’t know what music is, but for me, it’s the entire human, the brains, the heart, the soul, the guts. It should make you want to sing and dance. It’s sorrow and joy and everything we have as humans.”

Recent Honors for Ellen

In January of this year, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich’s papers were noted as one of the top five acquisitions of 2025 by the Library of Congress Music Division. The five noted acquisitions are: a viola made by Antonio Stradivari in 1690; the papers of Stephen Sondheim; the papers of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich; Igor Stravinsky’s holograph working manuscript for the opera “The Nightingale,” 1914; and the papers of pianist Paul Wittgenstein. Read more on the Library of Congress website [here](#).

And in May 2025, Ellen received the Doctor of Music degree – her second, this one honorary – from The Juilliard School at its 120th commencement ceremony, with, in the words of Juilliard Dean of Music David Ludwig, “our tremendous gratitude for the deep humanity of your life and music.” At the ceremony, where Ellen’s fellow honorees included Gustavo Dudamel and Masaaki Suzuki, five members of the 2025 graduating class performed the final movement of Ellen’s Quintet for Violin, Viola, Cello, Contrabass, and Piano (watch a performance of the work by Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio and Michael Tree, viola, Harold Robinson, double bass [here](#)).

A Cello Concerto in 2020

Zwilich’s last work for solo instrument and orchestra was her Cello Concerto, which premiered right before Covid lockdown in March 2020, performed by soloist Zuill Bailey with the South Florida Symphony Orchestra led by Sebrina Maria Alfonso. The subsequent Delos recording of the work, featuring Bailey with the Santa Rosa Symphony conducted by Francisco Lecce Chong, drew this praise from The Strad: “A cello concerto by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich was always going to be big news ... this [is a] sassy, jazzy work in which Zwilich’s hallmark propulsive energy in passages of incisively bowed syncopated semiquavers alternates with moments of profound calm. The orchestration is original and very effective, with the solo cello ... dialoguing with different instruments, and sounding particularly effective when playing in its uppermost reaches, above high violins, at the start of the third movement.”

Violist **Paul Neubauer**’s exceptional musicality and effortless playing have earned him praise as “a master musician” from The New York Times. In 2025, he released two albums for First Hand Records, each presenting the final works of two great composers: an all-Bartók album, which includes the revised version of the Viola Concerto, and a Shostakovich album, featuring the monumental Viola Sonata.

He has appeared as a soloist with more than 100 orchestras and has premiered viola concertos by Béla Bartók (revised version of the Viola Concerto), Reinhold Glière, Gordon Jacob, Henri Lazarof, Robert Suter, Joel Phillip Friedman, Aaron Jay Kernis, Detlev Müller-Siemens, David Ott, Krzysztof Penderecki, Tobias Picker, and Joan Tower. In addition to pursuing his solo career, Mr. Neubauer performs with SPA, a trio with soprano Susanna Phillips and pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, exploring a wide range of repertoire, including salon-style songs. A two-time Grammy nominee, he has recorded for numerous

labels, including Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, RCA Red Seal, and Sony Classical.

www.paulneubauer.com

Multiple GRAMMY-winning conductor **JoAnn Falletta** serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Music Director Laureate of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Brevard Music Center, and Conductor Laureate of the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra. Beginning this season, Falletta is also serving as Principal Guest Conductor and Artistic Advisor to the Omaha Symphony. She was recently named one of the “Fifty Great Conductors”, past and present, by Gramophone Magazine. As Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American orchestra. www.joannfalletta.com

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich

Ellen’s music is widely known because it is performed, recorded, broadcast, and – above all – listened to and liked by all sorts of audiences the world over. Combining craft and inspiration, reflecting an optimistic and humanistic spirit, Zwilich produces music "with fingerprints," music that is immediately recognizable as her own. As Janelle Gelfand wrote on Cincinnati.com, “Zwilich’s music is distinctive not only for its superb craftsmanship, but also for its wit, lyricism and sheer beauty, making it immediately appealing to listeners.”

In 2022, Ellen was featured in Gramophone magazine’s article [“10 female composers whose music you need to hear,”](#) which said, “[Her] works are regarded for their vigour, assertiveness and ability to challenge both the performer and audience.”

[Ellen Taaffe Zwilich: Symphony No. 5](#), the 2024 release by the [Boston Modern Orchestra Project](#) of Zwilich’s *Upbeat* (1999); *Concerto Elegia* (2015) with flute soloist Sarah Brady; *Commedia dell’Arte* (2012) with violin soloist Gabriela Diaz; and *Symphony No. 5 (Concerto for Orchestra)* (2008), elicited this praise from [Sequenza 21](#): “These are benchmark recordings of pieces in her catalog that show both her connection to tradition and eagerness to explore.”

For a sampler reel of Ellen’s music, visit the homepage of www.zwilich.com.

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