Ai Ishida Melby

Ai was born and raised in Tokyo by two musicians from the New Japan Philharmonic. In Japan, she studied viola at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Her viola studies continued at Northern Illinois University, where she won the concerto competition and performed Bartok’s Viola Concerto. Her teachers include Richard Young, Li-Kuo Chang, Yukiko Ogura and the Vermeer Quartet.

Ai has performed with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Grant Park Orchestra, and with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago as principal violist. She was principal violist for the Western Piedmont Symphony in North Carolina and she is a founding member of Kontras Quartet. She has traveled the world to appear at music festivals including the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival; the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, where she worked with the Tokyo String Quartet; and the Pacific Music Festival, where she performed with members of the Vienna Philharmonic. Recent performances include master classes with Nobuko Imai and Yo-Yo Ma, and a show at Chicago’s Green Mill following studies with jazz master David Bloom.

While she currently enjoys teaching viola and violin for Elmhurst College and leading sectional rehearsals for Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra as a viola coach. Ai currently lives in Park Ridge with her husband and two beautiful daughters.