

Preview

CityMusic Cleveland Intergenerational Concerts: Avner Dorman's *Uzu and Muzu from Kakaruzu*

by Mike Telin



Each season *CityMusic Cleveland* presents a series of intergenerational concerts devoted to music and educational activities that address the social concerns that stem from bullying as well as creating opportunities for discussions about conflict resolution. In 2011 CityMusic presented Margaret Brouwer's *Daniel and the Snakeman*, and in 2012 the children's opera *Brundibár* highlighted the orchestra's *Persistence of Creativity Series*.

Beginning on Tuesday, April 16th, and running through Saturday, April 20th, (see our concert listings pages for locations and times) [CityMusic](#) will present Avner Dorman's *Uzu and Muzu from Kakaruzu* under the direction of guest conductor David Alan Miller. The work features percussionists Luke Rinderknecht and Haruka Fuji. The concerts also include Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie Overture* and Schumann's *Symphony No. 4* (Schumann for vening performances only)

Israeli composer Avner Dorman has quickly risen to become one of the leading composers of his generation. His unique approach to rhythm and timbre has attracted some of the world's most notable conductors, including Zubin Mehta, Christoph Eschenbach, Riccardo Chailly, David Robertson, Andris Nelsons, Marin Alsop, and Justin Brown. His music has been performed by such renowned orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, Israel Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic and at the Salzburg Festival, Lucerne Festival, Cabrillo Music Festival, and many others.

Still, *Uzu and Muzu from Kakaruzu* is the composition that is near and dear to his heart. "I think the sotry deals directly with the biggest challenge of the human condition — we fight, and then what is the next step? Do we make up and figure out a solution or do we build walls and close the doors and never speak to each other again?" Dorman told us by telephone from New York.

Dorman's publisher, G. Shirmer, writes: "*Uzu and Muzu from Kakaruzu* is an engaging story by the renowned Israeli playwright and satirist Ephraim Sidon. In the mode of Dr. Seuss, it is a tale of a silly disagreement between two brothers that escalates into a con-

flict that lasts for generations! A high wall is built to separate the families as exaggerations vilify 'the other' until a boy and a girl find they like each other across the wall. Fortunately for all, there is a happy ending.”

“It’s a very special piece because the story and hopefully the music gets to the heart [of the problem] without being righteous,” Dorman says. “We can deal with [our problems] in different ways, with wars or we can figure out a compromise.”

Dorman first came across the book in 1988 while babysitting for a neighbor. “I must have been thirteen, and I took it out of the bookcase and read it to him. I remember thinking that it was a beautiful story, but it was the only time in my life that I read the story.” So what caused him to set the tale to music? “I had written a double percussion concerto, *Spices, Perfumes, Toxins!* for the Israel Philharmonic and while I was traveling to Israel for the premiere, I was thinking about how much I had enjoyed working with the two percussionists. I didn’t want the project to end and I thought that I needed to find a way to keep the collaboration going. I was literally at the Newark airport when it hit me: what if I took this story and made it into a musical piece? The two percussionists would [play the roles] of the two brothers. It just came back to me after almost twenty years.”

Although it took the composer a while to find an orchestra to commission the work, he says that he was relentless about finding one. “I knew I really wanted to do it and I’m happy that I did.” The work represents the culmination of Dorman’s year-long *Music Alive Residency* with the Stockton Symphony who premiered the work in March of 2012. *Uzu and Muzu* was written with young audiences in mind. The residency encouraged children to read and write through a series of deep educational activities as well as created opportunities for meaningful dialogue around conflict and resolution.

CityMusic Cleveland executive director Eugenia Strauss says that it was the theme of conflict resolution that first attracted her to the work. “Each season we do a series of concerts that address the social concerns that stem from bullying as well as creating opportunities for discussions about conflict resolution. This year we are also presenting a concert at the Juvenile Detention Center. We have provided the center with materials including the story and the music. All of the kids have been working with volunteers to write their own stories.”

Additionally, Dorman and percussionist Luke Reinderknecht have visited schools to talk about the story. Has Dorman found the reaction to the story from the kids in Cleveland different then in other parts of the country? “I did the first residency in Stockton, California and I spoke to thousands of kids from all socio-economic backgrounds, from very poor to very wealthy. In Cleveland it has mainly been lower income and my impression is that everyone is the same,” Dorman points out. “I think the commonalities far outweigh the differences. I think that is part of the beauty of the story, that we are all made of the same basic thing. Not that individuality isn’t important, but the idea that a school in Cleveland will relate to it more then a school in Stockton is just not the case. We all fight and we all have our ways of dealing with it.”

How does Dorman feel about having *Uzu and Muzu* referred to as the next *Peter and the Wolf*? “If the piece does become as popular as that I would be very happy, but you would

have to be a bit of a sensationalist to declare that your piece is the next *Peter and the Wolf*. To be honest, most of the pieces that were geared toward children were written in a time and context that makes them not so effective anymore. Prokofiev introduces all of the instruments through their solos. I consciously avoided all of that because I think it's too didactic and not necessarily relevant to getting a young audience of today to think about fighting and making up. And I do think that if Prokofiev were writing today he too would have written a different piece. Unlike in the past, today's kids can be from any economic class and still not have any introduction to the arts, so we need a different kind of piece to talk to them. And it needs to be something that is less childlike and can talk to them so that they don't feel like the piece is for kids. Today the kids watch movies and TV. They live in a different world than kids did one hundred years ago."

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