

The Cleveland Orchestra's Ross Binnie gives a guided tour of the spring season

by Mike Telin



Now that the first spring flowers are poking their heads out of the ground, it's a good time to look ahead to The Cleveland Orchestra's busy schedule of events for April and May. And who is in a better position to talk about that than Ross Binnie, the orchestra's chief marketing officer?

"We've got a little bit of classical for everybody — that's my motto for the spring season,"

Binnie said during a lively telephone conversation. "If I had to point at a project that I am really looking forward to, I think that the opera, Strauss's *Daphne*, conducted by Franz Welser-Möst on May 27 and 30, is going to be really interesting. The director, James Darrah, has a real gift for bringing these works to life."

Although many details are still being worked out, the opera will be costumed and have staged elements.

During this same period the Orchestra will be welcoming the League of American Orchestras, who will hold their annual conference in Cleveland from May 27 to 29. On May 28 Welser-Möst will lead the orchestra in performances of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* ("Pastoral") and Strauss's *Symphonia domestica*. On May 29 Welser-Möst will conduct performances of Messiaen's *Hymne* and *Chronochromie*, as well as Dvořák's "New World" symphony.

"We've got three different programs that week — I think we're going to be pretty busy," Binnie said with a laugh. "We're expecting over 900 people to come into town for the League conference. This is the first time The Cleveland Orchestra has hosted it, so we're looking forward to being part of it. As I speak to people around the country who will be attending, a lot of them tell me that they are really excited about hearing The Cleveland

Orchestra in Severance Hall. Many have never had that opportunity, so it's going to be a real treat all around."

It's no secret that orchestras around the country — and around the world — have had to take some time to figure out how to remain relevant in the cultural lives of their cities in the 21st century. "I do think we have bucked the trend to a degree," Binnie said, "but it's because of the people of Cleveland and the love that they have for the Orchestra. Whether they attend regularly or not, they talk about it with pride, and I think that makes a huge difference to a city. I know that when I speak to people who are coming to the conference, they tell me that they just want to know how TCO is doing it. We haven't changed our programming core very much at all. We still do what we do best, and I think that's part of the secret."



One of the many things that make Binnie proud of TCO's accomplishments is the number of young people who are regularly attending concerts. "This year 45,000 people under the age of 25 will have heard TCO. That's 45,000 who have actually bought a ticket one way or the other. That is fantastic and it's because of all the simple and easy purchase options that are available."

Another source of pride for Binnie, and one he looks forward to showing off during the conference, is none other than the musicians themselves. "I've never seen a group of musicians take things this seriously and work this hard week after week. It's great to see."

Binnie went on to comment briefly on forthcoming concerts.

April 9, 10 and 11: “Mitsuko Uchida will be playing Mozart’s Piano Concertos Nos. 6 and 26 as part of an all-Mozart program. She’s an old friend of the orchestra and perhaps my favorite interpreter of Mozart.”

April 10: “James Feddeck will return to conduct a concert as part of our At Home Neighborhood Residency in Slavic Village.”

April 16, 17 and 18: “Lionel Bringuier will lead a program featuring Ravel’s *Bolero* and *Tombeau de Couperin*, Florent Schmitt’s *La Tragédie de Salomé*, and Saint-Saëns’s *Cello Concerto no. 1* with Gautier Capuçon as soloist. For me, *Bolero* had become one of those pieces that are a bit on the pops side of what we do, but when I heard Franz conduct it a few years back, I thought, boy, that really is a fun piece of music. That was the first time I had heard our orchestra play it and I am looking forward to hearing it again. I also love *Tombeau*.”



April 23, 24 and 25: “This will be a really special program. Susanna Mälkki will be making her Cleveland Orchestra debut conducting *Pétrouchka* and Sibelius’s *The Oceanides*. Jeremy Denk is also making his debut with Bartók’s *Piano Concert No. 3*.”

April 30 and May 1 and 2: “This is going to be a great all-Haydn program with conductor Matthew Halls and pianist Marc-André Hamelin. It’s going to be a four-work romp through Haydn which should be super. Then on Sunday afternoon, May 3rd we have a family concert, ‘Vivaldi’s Ring of Mystery.’”

May 7, 8, 9 and 10: “I’m looking forward to guest conductor Charles Dutoit. It’s been over 20 years since his last appearance here. It’s going to be terrific to hear him conduct Berlioz, which is his forte. And hearing *Damnation of Faust* performed by TCO and the chorus will be a rare treat.”

May 14, 15 and 16: “This will be a fantastic program with Franz conducting *Dvořák’s* ‘New World’ symphony. Hindemith’s *Concert Music for Strings and Brass* is also on the program, and Franz is bringing back the Widmann *Violin Concerto* with Christian Tetzlaff as soloist. The ‘New World’ will be big and bold and it’s always one of my favorites. In fact, it was the first piece I ever heard TCO perform live. I remember thinking, wow, the orchestra I came from is pretty good, but I couldn’t believe how great it sounded. I’m not trying to be arrogant, (laughing), but I did think yes, this is wow!”

“May 15th is a Fridays@7, so there will be a little bit of this and that in one evening, but it will also include the ‘New World’ symphony. These concerts are great because they allow us to provide more opportunities for people to try out TCO. During this series people can do the traditional concert format on Thursday and Saturday or the Friday version. It allows people to find their own place.”

In addition to the Severance concerts the Orchestra is now embarking on its third neighborhood residency. This year “At Home” is taking place in the [Broadway-Slavic Village](#) neighborhood. “This is our third year of the residencies, and we’re getting good at doing them,” Binnie said. “This one will be extended out over a longer period of time instead of a one-week intensive, as in the past. I like the way we’re doing it this year.”

Before we ended our conversation, Ross Binnie added one final event of note, the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra’s tour of China. “They’ll be having a send-off concert on June 14. Brett Mitchell will be conducting and I think this is really an event for people to get to and wish these fantastic young musicians well. A nine day tour of China for those young musicians is going to be a real treat for them.”

That send-off concert will begin at 3:00 pm on Sunday, June 14 at Severance Hall. The program includes Shostakovich’s *Festive Overture*, Kilar’s *Orawa*, Barber’s *Medea’s Dance of Vengeance*, and Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4*.

Summing up the spring season at Severance Hall, Binnie said, “When I look at the schedule I’m quite pleased with the way things have turned out.”

TCO photos by Roger Mastroianni.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 8, 2015.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)