

Preview

Kent/Blossom Festival: a conversation with Omni Quartet violinist Jung-Min Amy Lee

by Mike Telin



We continue our coverage of the [Kent/Blossom Music Festival](#) with an enlightening conversation with violinist and faculty member [Jung-Min Amy Lee](#). Lee joined The Cleveland Orchestra as associate concertmaster in March 2008 and has served on the Kent/Blossom Faculty since that same summer.

On Wednesday, July 10 beginning at 7:30 pm in Ludwig Recital Hall, Amy Lee (left in photo) will join her Cleveland Orchestra colleagues and Omni Quartet members violinist Alicia Koelz, violist Joanna Patterson,

and cellist Tanya Ell for a performance of Bartok's *3rd String Quartet* and Kodaly's *Duo for Violin and Cello*. The program also includes Ligeti's *Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano* featuring Cleveland Orchestra principal horn Richard King and pianist Randall Fusco.

For Amy Lee, teaching is all about the passing down of traditions. "I think the real beauty of [teaching] is that you take the traditions from the past, preserve them and hopefully better them, and hand them down to the younger generation." Beginning in the fall, Lee will have the opportunity to pass down musical traditions more when she becomes part of a new faculty ensemble at the Hugh A. Glauser School of Music at Kent State University. The ensemble includes current Kent faculty members pianist Donna Lee, cellist Keith Robinson, violist Yu Jin and violinist Cathy Meng Robinson. "I'm very excited because I do enjoy teaching very much," Lee told us by telephone. But we began our conversation by asking her why she thinks summer music festivals like Blossom are important in the development of young musicians.

Amy Lee: I think they are one of the most important factors in the development of young players. They are exposed to the artists and faculty members and get to work with them on a regular basis, which is different from the faculty they work with during the rest of the year. And of course getting to be with friends and peers during the festivals can be pure joy. I think because of that young musicians can learn to really love what they do.

In another sense I think [festivals] can be very challenging as well as a big motivation factor. It's kind of like learning a language, the best way to do it is to immerse yourself in it and festivals are [about] immersing yourself in music.

It was at a music festival as a young kid that I decided that being a musician was what I really wanted to do with my life. And it was during another music festival that I developed my intense love for chamber music.

Mike Telin: Especially as a very young player, getting to meet other kids your age who share your passion can be amazing.

AL: You're right, it's an eye opening experience. It's like, wow, others also have a real passion for music and I think that is a great thing for young people.

It's also a great opportunity for us as faculty members to pass down traditions that we have learned from our exposure to the previous generation. And as much as there is a strong outreach initiative to cultivate and educate new audiences, the other side to that is the educating of future musicians and keeping those traditions strong.

MT: Tell me about the program for the concert on July 10. It's really great.

AL: Thanks. I love it, but it is challenging.

MT: I am curious as to why you choose the Ligeti horn trio over the Brahms?

AL: First, we have already performed the Brahms and Rich and I recorded it with Orli Shaham. That was an amazing musical experience. I have so much respect for Rich and since that time we have been talking about the fact that we should play the Ligeti, and finally the idea has become a reality. Then I basically programmed the Kodaly and Bartok around the Ligeti trio.

MT: I think the Bartok quartets are fantastic and it is difficult not to like the Kodaly. Regarding the Omni Quartet: I know you play a lot of chamber music and I'm wondering what you think is the mark of a great chamber music colleague?

AL: That is a good question. Of course, it is important to speak a similar musical language. And I think that what makes our quartet so special is that very often you can talk about musical ideas and feelings, but it really comes down to what happens at the moment you are playing music together. When you are playing a piece of music with an attitude of supporting each other. When you are inspired by something a colleague is playing and you take from that and add to it. That is a real communication that happens in the moment. And that can happen beautifully when four people speak that similar musical language. That is the beauty of chamber music. It also helps that they are all amazing musicians.

MT: I know it is a sort of difficult question to answer, because you first work with others because they are good musicians, but sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

AL: Exactly, and sometimes it doesn't necessarily take the best four players to have an amazing quartet, it's more about the dynamic of the group. And for us it helps that we're also best friends. I have found my musical soul mates and best friends in The Cleveland Orchestra.

MT: That's great to hear. And along the lines of musical soul mates and returning to building new audiences: you have been a member of Ensemble HD from the beginning. What kind of enjoyment do you get from performing in a situation like you do at The Happy Dog?

AL: It's a whole different kind of energy that you feel from the audience. At any given performance we would have a number of people come up and say "you know, what you do is really cool. I never thought I would like that kind of stuff — I never thought I would like classical music, but now I want to go and listen to it, I want to come to your concerts at Severance Hall and thank you for introducing this kind of music to us." That kind of satisfaction, this joy that we as performers take away is so different from the joy that we get from performing for the audience who regularly comes to Severance. For me that is very rewarding.

MT: Yes, and as you said, it isn't an either/or situation, it's just a different experience.

AL: Exactly! It is so important because I think it is hard for many people to experience [classical music] and only if they experience it will they realize that they like it. Classical music can be difficult to approach. Many people [don't think] of going to a concert hall because it is out of their comfort zone and tickets can be expensive.

I feel like there is an invisible curtain between musicians and the public and I feel that what [Ensemble HD] is doing is raising that invisible curtain between us and the audience so they are exposed to it in the same way the public is exposed to pop culture. You don't have to look for it, it's just all around you. Unfortunately that isn't the case with classical music yet, so we're starting from our little corner on the west side of Cleveland. That's how we're looking at it.

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