

Pianist Gavin George to be featured young soloist with Cleveland Women's Orchestra at Severance Hall

by Daniel Hathaway



In its 79 years as an organization, the Cleveland Women's Orchestra has invited many young soloists to perform with the ensemble, sometimes giving them their first opportunity to play with an orchestra.

On Sunday, April 27 at 3:30 pm in Severance Hall, the CWO will team up with one of the youngest soloists ever when ten-year-old Gavin M. George of Granville joins Robert L. Cronquist and the ensemble for Mendelssohn's *Piano Concerto No. 1 in g* — but in this case the young artist is already a veteran concerto player, having performed with orchestras in Ohio, Italy and Israel.

The best introduction to Gavin's prowess at the keyboard is one of his YouTube videos, especially his performance of the first movement of Mendelssohn

No. 1 with Israel's Ashdod Symphony under Uri Segal. Before you read any further, take ten minutes and [have a look](#).

Gavin George lives with his parents Eric and Mary and eight-year-old brother Max in Granville, OH near Columbus. Like many other talented young musicians, he's home schooled by his mother, an education specialist. (The *Columbus Dispatch* carried a nice [feature](#) on Gavin and his family in 2012).

His early fascination with music expressed itself at the age of 2-1/2 when he watched an orchestral DVD his mother had received as a gift. "I'm not the kind of kid to watch TV," he said in a phone conversation last week, "but I fell in love with it — dancing on the couch and conducting." He was particularly taken with Strauss's *Beautiful blue Danube Waltz*.

His interest in the piano led to lessons with Capital University Conservatory retired teacher Mary Craig Powell. Gavin now travels twice a month to Cleveland to study with Antonio Pompa-Baldi.

Gavin is just about as natural a ten-year-old as you can imagine, perhaps with more sheer enthusiasm than most. He answers the phone with a long-drawn out “Hiiiiiiiiiiii!” and tells me he’s having a “super” day. When not playing the piano, he enjoys playing outside with his brother, “imaginary games, basketball, baseball and kickball.”

Asked about which pianists he admires, Gavin starts by naming his teachers, then adds Van Cliburn and Evgeny Kissin. He says he likes it when their “natural passion shows when they play on YouTube.” But he doesn’t have a favorite composer. “I really like them all,” he says, adding that “last week I listened to Tchaikovsky and Chopin Nocturnes at night.” (Gavin’s mother tells me later that he’s never been able to choose a favorite composer when interviewed. He tells me he likes “a wide variety.”)

Gavin George had just returned from four days in Italy where he “played for private corporate events in Sorrento.” (He helpfully spells out the name of the town for me.) He liked the climate and enjoyed the view of Mt. Vesuvius from his hotel window. Did seeing the volcano up close make him nervous? “No, I wasn’t worried about it going off anytime soon.”

Gavin has already played the first movement of the Mendelssohn both with the Newark Granville Symphony and abroad. “I had a wonderful time and the audience really liked it!” What’s challenging about the piece for him? “Making sure all the speed work is crystal clear and not getting carried away with the tempo!” Good answer.

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