

Blossom Music Festival: A Conversation with Renaud Capuçon

By Mike Telin



“I look forward to coming to Cleveland,” exclaimed French violinist [Renaud Capuçon](#) during a recent telephone conversation from his home in Paris. “I’ve been to the city before, but this is my debut with the orchestra, although I have heard them in Paris and in Lucerne with Franz Welser-Möst.”

On Saturday, July 5 at 8:00 pm at Blossom Music Center, Hans Graf will lead the Cleveland Orchestra in a concert featuring Sibelius’s *Violin Concerto*, Tchaikovsky’s *Capriccio Italien* and Dvořák’s *Symphony No. 9 "From the New World"*. (Graf replaces Jaap van Zweden, who is being treated for a shoulder injury). The evening concludes with post-concert fireworks.

A gracious and humble conversationalist, Capuçon thanks me for calling him at exactly the appointed hour. Like many violinists, Capuçon began studying Sibelius’s concerto at an early age, in his case at 14. “My copy has 1990 written in the small writing of a kid, so I’ve kind of lived with it. It’s one of those pieces that is exactly connected to the soul of the composer. It’s like his second symphony. You have pictures in your mind coming straight at you.”

He does admit that maturing and gaining life experience — a constant theme in our conversation — has helped him to better understand the concerto. The opportunity to travel to Finland has also given Capuçon insights into the work. “I don’t think you have to be Finnish to play the piece,” he said laughing, “but I have to say that it’s very useful and very interesting to know people from that country because you know how they speak and you hear key things in their articulation.

“When you have been there and you see so much light, or no light at all if it’s winter, then you understand a little bit more the kind of moods the people can have. They are

some of the warmest people in the world. If you don't know them very well you can think they are a bit cold or distant but it's just that they are shy. Of course with all of this I'm just talking in a big picture, but I really think it helps. Now that I have traveled and met a lot of people I understand Sibelius better."

He holds the same philosophy when it comes to understanding all music. "I don't think it's stupid to say this. If you want to play French music, I think it is important to have been to a museum and seen paintings of Monet. All these things help."

Returning to his theme of life experience, he recalls being in a lesson when he was 18. "I remember playing a piece by Brahms and I was quite happy with the way that I played it. But my teacher didn't say anything. So I asked her - what do you think? And she said 'well, you need time'. And I said 'what do you mean?' Of course now I understand."

Another event that changed Capuçon's life was the birth of his child. "Becoming a father three years ago completely changed how I look at music. Before, the most important thing was to be on stage and to be good. Now the most important thing in my life is my kid. It's all about your perspective. When I was younger I didn't have the big picture. I really think that being a musician takes a long time. It's like you are on a very long path. But I have always loved music so much and that is still the case today."

Referring to a photo of him playing at the top of the Eiffel Tower that is posted on his Facebook page I ask him if he thinks that the public wants all musicians to be like rock stars. "When you meet me you will see straight away that I am no rock star — or any star at all. Like you, I am absolutely normal." We both get a big laugh out of use of the word normal. "But Twitter is great because I can, and I actually do, follow a lot of journalists, and in 30 seconds I know what is happening in the world. I love that. My wife is a journalist so I need to know what's happening. I should do more with Facebook, but it does take time and it should be connected to your private life, but I can't tell private things so I just try to say nice things that are never too private. You do need to find the right balance."

I also ask about the photos of tennis stars Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic at this summer's French Open posted on his Twitter account. "I am a big tennis fan and I go to Roland Garros every year. I had the great privilege this year to be invited to lunch by the president of Roland Garros, where I sat next to Chris Evert. It is amazing when you meet these kinds of champions. She had no idea who I was but we spoke about politics, about America and France. She was just lovely and she is a great example of how when people are just interested in each other then the world will be a bit better. I have had the chance to meet some of the most amazing people, not only musicians but people. It all makes you a better person."

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