

The Cleveland Orchestra to debut Summers@Severance series

By Mike Telin



“We haven’t performed in Severance Hall during the summer since we opened Blossom Music Center in 1968, so this is exciting,” said Ross Binnie, Chief Marketing Officer at The Cleveland Orchestra, in a recent telephone conversation.

The Cleveland Orchestra will begin its new Summers@Severance series on Friday, August 1st at 7:00 pm, when conductor Johannes Debus will lead performances of Rachmaninoff’s *Symphonic Dances* and Ravel’s *Pavane*

for a Dead Princess and the *Piano Concerto in G major*, featuring Benjamin Grosvenor as soloist. The series marks the first time in decades that the Orchestra is presenting its own series of ticketed summer concerts at Severance Hall.

Although some “Popular Concerts” and Opera were presented by the Orchestra in Severance Hall during the summers of 1932-33 and 1964-68, aside from the occasional special performances such as the Final rounds of the Cleveland International Piano Competition and The Cooper International Competition, Severance Hall has remained silent during the summer months.

Not that the Orchestra didn’t perform during the summer in those intervening years. They held regular concerts at the Public Auditorium among other Cleveland venues from 1939 until 1968.

Why does Binnie believe this is the right time to begin a series such as this? “I think the primary reason is the transformation that has happened in University Circle in the last few years,” he said. “The change is so dramatic and the area is really buzzing with life now on a year-round basis. So it seemed an oversight not to have our doors opened as well to anyone wants to come to hear our concerts indoors in a relaxed atmosphere in the summer.” Binnie adds that the series is designed to expand the ensemble’s summertime offerings and showcase the Orchestra as an integral part of its home neighborhood year-round.

Another reason Binnie believes the time is right is because of the success of the Orchestra’s Fridays@7 series. Like that popular offering, Summers@Severance concerts will last one hour. The Front Terrace will be open before and after each concert, with beverage service and seating areas. Special “happy hour” drink prices will be featured in the hour prior to each concert. Following the performance, everyone is invited to enjoy the evening outdoors with fellow concertgoers. “Our goal is to create a sublime night of music with some wine and great company. So for those people who may want to come to a Severance Hall concert but have never been before, this is just another option, and I’m very excited about it.”

On Friday, August 15, Jahja Ling will lead an all-Beethoven program that includes the Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus*, *Symphony No. 4* and the *Choral Fantasy*, featuring pianist Orion Weiss and the Blossom Festival Chorus. The concert is presented in conjunction with Cleveland’s hosting of the 2014 Gay Games, August 9-16, and will be one of several official cultural events for the Games. “This is an important partnership,” Binnie points out. “It’s a big event coming to town and showcasing Cleveland as a cultural hub is an essential part of the Games. The Cleveland Orchestra is certainly part of that cultural theme. We want to show off our great orchestra and our great city to as many people as possible, and having this opportunity to do that in Severance Hall is terrific.”

For the August 29 concert, the Orchestra will partner with area colleges and universities as a special kick-off to the fall semester. Franz Welser-Möst will lead a program that includes Jörg Widmann’s *Lied* and *Flûte en suite* (for flute and orchestra) with principal flutist Joshua Smith, and Brahms’s *Symphony No. 1*. The concert is also part of a three-concert set — the other two are at Blossom — that gives audiences the chance to hear the music that will be presented during TCO’s September European tour.

How long has this series been in development? “We started thinking about it last summer. The easy part is having the idea, the hard part is the execution. Our Director of Artistic Planning, Mark Williams, is a unique talent,” Binnie said, pointing out that in addition to the winter subscription series, the planning puzzle also included international and national touring, local run-outs, the Miami residency, and the neighborhood residency,

along with some opera and ballet. “The big point is that if we’re going to play more music for more people, we need to offer more choices.”

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