

Contemporary Youth Orchestra alumni to gather for a concert on December 20

Mike Telin



This time of year there is a seemingly endless number of holiday concerts on the calendar. If you're looking for something different, just for one evening, the Contemporary Youth Orchestra invites you to be part of their 20th anniversary celebration. On Saturday, December 20 at 7:00 pm in Waetjen Auditorium at Cleveland State University, Liza Grossman will lead the 120-member CYO Reunion Orchestra in a free concert featuring Igor Stravinsky's "Berceuse" and "Finale" (*Firebird Suite*), Derek Snyder's *Sun Up*, Tan Dun's *Internet Symphony*, Gustav Holst's "Mars" (*The Planets*) and Arturo Márquez's *Danzón No. 2*.

Grossman could not be more pleased with the fact that Saturday's orchestra will include alumni representing each of CYO's past nineteen seasons. "For the first time in our history alums are coming back for one magical night! There are a few charter members returning and I believe there will be at least one member from each season after that. Some people I haven't seen in 18 years, but we'll have nametags for everybody so we'll know who is who. I think some of them may be older than I am by now!"

Letting everyone reacquaint themselves with one another is a priority. "Before the first rehearsal we're having an hour long meet-and-greet just to give everyone an opportunity to reconnect."

Many of the alumni have gone on to attend some of the country's best conservatories and schools of music. "I would say that about half of the returning members are now professional musicians," Grossman said. She points out that even though many have not chosen music as their career path, they do continue to play on a regular basis. Others have started practicing again in anticipation of the concert.



The fact that so many members are returning to take part in the concert has surprised Grossman. "Honestly, this has reminded me how much CYO means to those who have played in the orchestra."

A quick look at the CYO website illustrates its impact. Tricia Fairman, a member of the violin section from 2002-2004 said, "CYO opened my mind to creative applications; it helped me with my Arts Administration classes by exposing me to the industry." Joseph



Weagraff, a member of the cello section from 2003-2005 said, “CYO helped me adapt to learning and comprehending new topics and allowed me to explore with more excitement.” And according to Erica Zappia, a member of the viola section from 2006-2007, “CYO and Liza encouraged me to be who I am and to celebrate that.”

Grossman admitted that she’s had to think about how to approach the first rehearsal for the challenging program. “They are the same people, they’re just riding on a different level because of their experiences of being on this planet. I’m so excited to see what they are going to bring to the table because of those life experiences.”

Not every returning member is Cleveland-based. Many are flying in especially for the occasion, while others have family in the area. “There was thought put into the timing of this concert. We knew that many would be coming home for the holidays, which did make things a little easier,” Grossman said. Still, tracking down 19 years worth of former members was not an easy task. “It took work, and we did lot of it through social media. That was very crucial in our quest to locate people although we weren’t able to find everyone. We heard from a lot more former members than the 120 who will be on stage. Some are not able to participate, although they sent congratulatory notes. And others are happy just to be in the audience. But part of our mission is building interested and enthusiastic audiences, so that part is coming to fruition as well.”

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