

Cleveland Cello Society: iCellisti to feature mega-cello concert at Harkness

by Daniel Hathaway



The Cleveland Cello Society’s annual “iCellisti” concert on Friday, January 30 at CWRU’s Harkness Chapel might set a local record for the number of cellists to appear onstage at the same time. At the end of a program featuring members of The Cleveland Orchestra cello section in various solos, duets and quartets, the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra cello section will join their senior counterparts in a work that calls for an ensemble of twelve performers.

“Julius Klengel’s *Hymnus* looks a little intimidating in the score, with its twelve individual parts,” TCO cellist Bryan Dumm said in a telephone conversation.

“But it’s a charming piece in a Romantic style. We’ll be doubling the parts, with Youth Orchestra players sharing stands with Cleveland Orchestra cellists. Having twenty-two cellists onstage at the same time will thicken the texture and make the piece even a bit nicer. It’s going to sound ringing and quite glorious in Harkness Chapel.”

At a Cleveland Cello Society brainstorming session last summer, Dumm proposed a concert of music written by cellist-composers for this year’s edition of iCellisti. “We try to come up with an interesting and innovative idea every year, and this was one that came to the surface,” Dumm said. He was encouraged to run with it. “I was delighted to find that the whole Cleveland Orchestra cello section was available for the concert — except for one player who had a conflict. I believe this is the first time that the whole group will participate in iCellisti. A lot of things just fell into place.”



Having taken the lead in designing the program for January 30, Dumm (left) will also serve as narrator for the concert. “My personal journey into music for multiple cellos began seven or eight years ago when I was asked to teach a graduate course in cello repertoire at Cleveland State University. There was no curriculum, so I began to research what music was available and fell in love with the repertoire.”

The program will feature a series of soloists — Brian Thornton in Carlo Alfredo Piatti’s *Caprice No. 1*, Richard Weiss in Gaspar Cassadó’s *Requiebros*, and Mark Kosower in Adrien-François Servais’s *Souvenir de Spa*, with the collaboration of pianist Jee-Won Oh — plus duets and quartets by Cervetto, Berteau, Boccherini and Fitzenhagen. “A focal point is Mark’s *Souvenir*,” Dumm said. “Most cellists consider it completely unplayable, but our section leader is very willing to learn new music.”

As it turned out, not all the composers on the program were practitioners of the instrument. “Richard Wagner wasn’t a cellist, of course, so that’s a stretch. But Friedrich Grützmacher, who arranged the *Feierliches Stück* from *Lohengrin* for four cellos, is very well known, and stands in the long tradition of cellists arranging other people’s music.”

Bryan Dumm isn’t absolutely sure who first had the idea of creating music for multiple cellos. “The earliest work on Friday’s program is a canon for two cellos, but that comes out of the baroque trio sonata tradition where one cello takes the solo line and the other plays continuo. As for ensemble pieces, the earliest one we’re doing is one of Wilhelm Fitzenhagen’s concert waltzes for four cellos. We were looking for cellists who had strong influences on great composers. He’s best known as the dedicatee for Tchaikovsky’s *Rococo Variations*, and is responsible for determining the order of the variations most often played today. The concert waltz is a very nice piece.”

How is it that music for multiple cellos works so well? “We all like each other a lot,” Dumm said. “Cellists are pretty easygoing and we don’t tend to get on each other’s nerves too much. The ‘mellow cello’ is an accurate stereotype. And because we’re so often all alone in chamber music, it’s fun to have the opportunity to play together.”

So many of Dumm’s colleagues came forward with repertoire suggestions for this year’s iCellisti that not every proposal made it onto the program. “We could easily have filled another recital,” he said. “Right now it has the right sort of flow and variety to it. I’m glad to have all my colleagues together for it.”

Hymnus für zwölf Violoncelli

Julius Klengel op. 57

Andante cantabile

The image shows a page of musical notation for twelve cellos. The title is 'Hymnus für zwölf Violoncelli' by Julius Klengel, Op. 57. The tempo is 'Andante cantabile'. The score consists of twelve staves, each representing a cello. The music is written in a single system with various dynamics like 'pp' and 'mf' and includes the instruction 'non sord.'.

Top photo: The Cleveland Orchestra cello section at the Arsht Center in Miami.

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