

Violinist Vadim Gluzman to make Cleveland Orchestra debut this week at Severance Hall

by Mike Telin



It goes without saying that it takes talent and hard work to have an international concert career. However, being at the right place at the right time doesn't hurt. For the celebrated violinist [Vadim Gluzman](#), his good fortune came when he met violinist Issac Stern as a teenager, quite by accident. In an article titled "[The accidental virtuoso](#)," Gluzman recalled the off-chance meeting with Stern: "I made my way to Jerusalem, and at the JMC I told the receptionist I wanted to play for Isaac Stern. And she said: 'Welcome to the club! You should have arranged this a couple of years ago.'"

Gluzman had the impression his quest was hopeless, but at that very moment Stern himself walked in. The receptionist explained the situation. To Gluzman's surprise, instead of sending him away, Stern said, 'Go and warm up and I'll give you five minutes.' "So I went," Gluzman said, "...and he was with me for about two hours. And at the end of that, I had a new violin waiting for me in Tel Aviv, a scholarship and the possibility to work with him whenever I could."

On Thursday, January 29 at 7:30 in Severance Hall, Vadim Gluzman will make his Cleveland Orchestra debut performing Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No. 2*. The concert also marks the debut of Finnish conductor Hannu Lintu, who will lead performances of Sibelius's *Pohjola's Daughter* and Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 5*. The program will be repeated on Friday the 30th and Saturday the 31st.

Lintu is stepping in to replace conductor and frequent Gluzman collaborator Tugan Sokhiev, whose withdrawal due to illness was announced the morning of January 21. “I heard the news earlier today,” Gluzman said during a telephone conversation that afternoon. “I was very sorry to hear it, but I can assure you we’re in great shape with Hannu Lintu. We have been working together for a while, most recently in October of 2014.”

Gluzman, a relaxed and engaging conversationalist, described Prokofiev’s concerto as a special piece. “It’s special from many angles. He was writing it at the same time as *Romeo and Juliet*. There are moments of stunning beauty — the entire second movement is absolutely gorgeous. At the same time, we see the mechanical, almost emotionless side of Prokofiev lying next to this incredible beauty. That is the challenge of performing the work, to bring out these two sides that are so diametrically opposed to each other. You go from black to white in a matter of bars, without any transition whatsoever. That is what makes the concerto absolutely stunning.”

Another aspect of the concerto Gluzman finds interesting is the way Prokofiev has incorporated a variety of musical influences. “We can say this is Russian music or German music, but at the same time, music is music. And Prokofiev was writing the piece while he was on the road. Some of it was written in Baku, some in Paris, and the piece was premiered in Madrid. And we do hear Madrid in the third movement. He uses castanets to give it a Spanish flavor.”

One characteristic of Gluzman’s playing that has caught the attention of both audiences and critics is his ability to perform contemporary music with the same passion as the romantic masterpieces. This trait earned him a chapter in Volume Two of Jean-Michel Molkhou's acclaimed 2011 survey, *Great Violinists of the Twentieth Century*. Gluzman’s chapter, entitled “In the footsteps of the great old masters,” highlights his penchant for bringing the glorious violinistic tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries back to life.

He gave an example of how a contemporary work has influenced an older work. “One of the most profound experiences I’ve had was with the composer Sofia Gubaidulina. I was preparing to play her *Offertorium*, which is based on Bach’s *The Musical Offering*, for the first time. I got in touch with her and she agreed to see me, and it was the most illuminating six hours that I have ever had with a musician. Not only did she explain everything in the music, but all these years later — the piece was written in 1980 — we’re sitting in her living room and she’s still changing things. She even called her publisher and asked them to make the changes. It’s one of the greatest pieces of the 20th century and she was still working on it. On the train back to Berlin, I suddenly felt the urge to play Bach. Like all violinists I certainly had studied Bach, but I never had the guts to play it publicly as a professional. Something in my stomach now told me I had to play

it. A year and a half later I played the first program, and two years after that I made the recording.”

In addition to works by Sofia Gubaidulina, Vadim Gluzman has given live and recorded premieres of pieces by Giya Kancheli, Peteris Vasks and Lera Auerbach. He also performed the UK premiere of Michael Daugherty's violin concerto, *Fire and Blood*, with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican. I tell him that I love the music of all those composers, though I'm not sure what it means. “It probably means that we both have good taste,” he answers with a laugh. “To me it is incredibly inspiring to go to a composer and point at a bar in the music and say how or why, and get the information directly from the source. And because of these experiences I see how much music is always alive, how nothing is carved in stone.”

Gluzman, who divides his time between Israel and Chicago, finds musical inspiration through creating programs for the *North Shore Chamber Music Festival*, which he founded with his wife and recital partner, pianist Angela Yoffe. “Creating programs is truly one of the greatest pleasures that I have in my artistic life. It's like being a child in a toy store.”

What's his secret to programming? “Someone once told me that to choose a great present for a friend, you should choose something that you would love to have yourself. So I program music that I truly love. But one also has to think about musical diversity and include new music, and this year every concert will include a modern composition. We'll feature Schnittke, Corigliano and Golijov's *The dreams and prayers of Isaac the Blind* — that is a very big work, so the audience will be in for a treat.” Gluzman also enjoys uncovering forgotten works, such as Mendelssohn's *Piano Sextet* and Grieg's *Piano Quintet*. “At every concert we try to balance between new, unknown and blockbuster pieces.”

Gluzman and Yoffe are committed to involving the community, especially young performers, at the Festival. “It's just like I insist on new music — because it is our future. If we don't let young composers be heard, how will we ever find the next Bernstein, Shostakovich or Beethoven? The same is true for young players. They are our future performers, and they are the future audiences, too. We need to do our part to be sure that there will be people playing and listening after we are gone.”

The Festival has also partnered with the International Center on Deafness and the Arts, a non-profit based in Northbrook, IL. “These were some of the most touching moments I have ever experienced in the concert hall, but I do have to give my wife credit for this partnership. Most of the kids are completely deaf. They react to music through vibrations. It's incredible. They sit in the audience hugging balloons — this is how they experience music — and it's incomprehensible to us. I can't imagine how it feels, I only can see it

from the side.” The Festival also has an ongoing partnership with the Betty Haag Academy of Music, where Gluzman regularly gives master classes.

This summer marks the fifth edition of the *North Shore Chamber Music Festival*, and although he pointed out that it is small, he and his wife have enjoyed getting to know the many audience members who return every year. “We know their names and the names of their children. It really has become a community, and that is very special.”

Concluding our conversation, I ask him if he is still a hockey fan. “I love hockey, but I don’t have enough time to watch a match from beginning to end. I did have an aspiration to be a goalie. I attended a club and played in a league for kids before my parents caught me. But I realized that one unfortunate fall and the violin career would be over.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com January 27, 2015.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)