

## CityMusic Cleveland: a conversation with violinist Adele Anthony

by Mike Telin



After winning the 1996 Carl Nielsen International Violin Competition, Adele Anthony has enjoyed an acclaimed career as a concerto soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. On Thursday, March 12 at 7:30 in Mentor High School's Performing Arts Center, CityMusic Cleveland will present the first of four free performances featuring Adele Anthony as soloist in Carl Nielsen's *Violin Concerto*. (See our concert listings for additional times and locations.) The concerts, led by guest conductor Joaquin Valdepeñas, will also include Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1* and Arvo Pärt's *Symphony No. 4, Los Angeles*.

During a recent telephone conversation I confessed to Adele Anthony that Nielsen's *Violin Concerto* is a work with which I am not extremely familiar. "I hear that a lot," she responded with a laugh. "And it's too bad because I think it's a beautiful work that people will appreciate. It has a very gripping opening. I found it to be very attractive from the first time I heard it."

Anthony's first exposure to the piece was through her violinist father. "As a student in Germany, he studied with the great Hungarian violinist Tibor Varga, who's recording of the concerto we had at home. My father told me that it is a fantastic piece and that I should learn it. I listened to it and thought it was great, and when I was older I did learn it, later entering the competition with it. And because of that win, I have been able to perform it a lot more than perhaps I would have otherwise."

The concerto is written in a melodic neo-classical style. "It's definitely a romantic concerto, but it's a little unusual in the way that it's formatted. It's written in two movements, but there are actually three. The first, Praeludium, has a long introduction with an exposition. The second is really like a slow movement and a third-movement scherzo all in one. But within that there is a classical form. It also has the musical

language unique to Nielsen that you also hear in his concertos for flute and clarinet. I think his music is distinctive. You recognize it as Nielsen as soon as you hear it.”

Anthony also finds the concerto to be uniquely Danish. “His melodies are very pastoral, and the countryside where he was born, near Odense on the island of Funen, is very beautiful. Interestingly, Hans Christian Andersen was born there as well, so you do think about that fairy-tale, idyllic life. And, the Danes know how to enjoy life, especially in the summer. I think you hear this in the music.”

At age 13, the Australian-born Adele Anthony became the youngest winner of the ABC Instrumental and Vocal Competition performing the Sibelius Concerto with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. Is there something about the Nordic composers? “I don’t know,” she said, laughing, “but it is a great part of the world to visit.”

From an early age, Anthony was fascinated with the violin. She recalled following her father around the house when he practiced, imitating him with a brush and comb. “At the time we lived in Tasmania, the southern island state of Australia. My father mentioned my interest to a friend who, as it turned out, was starting the very first Suzuki program in Tasmania. He told my father that I was welcome to come, and if I was interested I could stay. I was two and half years old and my parents thought I was too young, but they took me to the class and I enjoyed it. I think Suzuki is a wonderful way for young children to start playing. I remember going to my group classes, and it was kind of a social event. I had a 15-minute lesson and then played with the group. It was fun and I have very good memories of it.”

When it came time to enter conservatory, Anthony made the decision to attend the Juilliard School. “Going to New York was a little unusual. Most of the musicians that travel outside of Australia tend to gravitate towards London or Germany because there are a lot of Australians living there. When I arrived at Juilliard I didn’t know anybody, but I wanted to be there to study with Dorothy Delay. But it was also wonderful to meet hundreds of violinists there from all over the world who were doing the same things as I was.”

Today Anthony makes her home in New York City along with her husband violinist Gil Shaham and their three children. “The children are pretty much the focus of our lives. And I have to say that having them has made me enjoy playing the violin even more than before. It now feels like a gift to be able to do it. We love spending time with our kids, and we are fortunate as musicians because we do get to see them quite a lot.”

How does she juggle a career and family? “During the year my husband and I stagger our work, so one of us is always home. We’re fortunate to have the same manager at Opus3, and she makes sure that everything will work for us. The summer is the only time that we

perform together, so we bring everybody with us. This summer is exciting because we will be going to Australia to play with the Sydney Symphony, and we'll visit some relatives of course, then go to Colorado for Aspen after that.”

This week, Anthony is excited about working with conductor Joaquin Valdepeñas. “We are chamber music colleagues at Aspen. He’s a wonderful clarinetist, and I am looking forward to having this new relationship with him as a conductor.”

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