

The Cleveland Orchestra: Clarinetist Franklin Cohen to perform Weber's Second Concerto (July 26)

by Mike Telin



Although Franklin Cohen played his final concert as a member of The Cleveland Orchestra wind section back in May, on Sunday, July 26 at 7:00 pm at Blossom Music Center, Cohen will make his farewell appearance as concerto soloist after 39 seasons as the Orchestra's principal clarinet. The program includes Weber's *Clarinet Concerto No. 2*, and Elgar's *Enigma Variations*.

During a recent telephone conversation Cohen said that he looks forward to performing the Weber under the direction of his good friend Jahja Ling. "I love Jahja. He has such seriousness of purpose, yet such a great sense of humor. He's a wonderful family person, and he brings a lot of humanity to everything he does. And, if I have to play a last performance with this group, he's the one I want to do it with," Cohen said. "I think he's conducted more performances with The Cleveland Orchestra than almost any other conductor."

While he doesn't have an exact count, Cohen estimates the number of orchestral concerts that he and Ling have performed together to easily be in the 100s. "I've also been a soloist with him many times at Blossom and at Severance, as well as with the San Diego Symphony, and in Taipei when he was the director there. We have plans to play the Mozart concerto in Indonesia next year, which will be a lot of fun."

Why go out with the Weber Concerto? "I love Weber. He's an opera composer, and I think all of the diverse themes in the concerto are very operatic in nature with an outgoing mood. And Blossom is the perfect venue to play a piece like this. It's a little more edgy than the Mozart concerto. With his two clarinet concertos Weber really introduced the instrument to other composers."

Retirement from the Orchestra doesn't mean that Franklin Cohen is retiring from music. He recently wrapped up the fourth highly successful season of ChamberFest Cleveland. He just returned from Calgary, where was teaching and playing at the Morningside Music Bridge International Music Festival. He also served on the faculty at the Sarasota Music Festival. "I'm going to Miami for a festival the day after Blossom, then meeting up with my daughter Diana to play on a chamber music series on Martha's Vineyard, and after that I head off to teach in Colorado. Then I'll take a vacation there and do some hiking, relaxing, and just have a great time. I can't wait. So far, this retirement has been a wild ride."

In the fall, Cohen will continue to teach at the Cleveland Institute of Music. "I have a very large class this year — I think it's the largest I've ever had. There were some wonderful applicants, so I had the opportunity to balance the class in a way the makes sense. I used to teach only ten or eleven students along with performing and touring, so this should be quite nice both for me and for the students."

Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 21, 2015.

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