

Cleveland Orchestra Women's Committee hosts luncheon & conversation with Robert Vernon

by Daniel Hathaway



This summer, Cleveland Orchestra principal viola Robert Vernon will retire after serving in that position since 1976. Before he steps down from his illustrious career in the ensemble, The Cleveland Orchestra Women's Committee will honor him with a luncheon at Westwood Country Club in Rocky River on Friday, April 15 at 12 Noon.

On that occasion, a conversation with Vernon, the longest-tenured string principal in the history of The Cleveland Orchestra, will be moderated by one of the newest members of its staff. (Ilya Gidalevich became artistic administrator for the Orchestra last January, after serving as manager of artists and attractions at Opus 3 in New York.) An 11:30 am Patron's Reception with Robert Vernon will precede the Noon luncheon and presentation.

Vernon has racked up some impressive statistics during his four decades in The Cleveland Orchestra. He's played more than 4,500 concerts with the ensemble and appeared as soloist in 17 different works in more than 120 concerts at home and abroad under the baton of such distinguished conductors as Pierre Boulez, Christoph von Dohnányi, Valery Gergiev, Lorin Maazel, Simon Rattle, Georg Solti, and Franz Welser-Möst. His discography includes more than 300 individual works, and the Orchestra has honored him with three commissioned works over the years.

Vernon is highly regarded by his orchestral peers both for his playing and his leadership as section principal. In a 2012 [profile](#) in *The Plain Dealer*, his standmate for 25 years, assistant principal Lynne Ramsey noted, "He has so much technique, it's disgusting. He can play anything. And he's a killer hard worker. He really takes his job seriously."

Vernon's tenure with The Cleveland Orchestra has been paralleled by his teaching activities at the Cleveland Institute of Music — and for the past seven years at The Juilliard School in New York, from which he graduated with honors. Lynne Ramsey noted in the 2012 profile how many of Vernon's students have gone on to play in major orchestras (and to help them get there, Vernon has written a book, *The Essential Orchestral Excerpts for Viola: Keys to a Successful Audition*.) Although Ramsey didn't study with Vernon herself, she's well aware of the effect he's had on those who did. "He's the go-to teacher. He always wants to figure out how to make it right." It even rubs off on his orchestral colleagues. "I've learned a lot just sitting next to him," she said.

Tickets for the April 15 luncheon are \$40 for Cleveland Orchestra Women's Committee members, and \$50 for non-members (you can join the organization for \$50 a year). Tickets for the Patron Reception including priority seating for the Luncheon are \$100. Reservations should be made by April 11 by [email](#) to Pat Sommer.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 9, 2016.

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