

Italian violinist Francesco D'Orazio to perform on CMA Series

by Mike Telin



By the time Italian violinist Francesco D'Orazio decided to learn Luciano Berio's *Sequenza VIII*, many violinists were already playing the challenging work. He knew he would need to bring a new approach to the piece if he were to stand any chance of impressing the composer. "So I decided to play it from memory," D'Orazio said during a telephone conversation from Italy,

"and nobody was doing that back then."

Audiences will have the opportunity to hear the celebrated violinist perform Berio's *Sequenza VIII* this week, when he makes his Cleveland debut on Friday, December 9 at 7:30 at Transformer Station as part of the Cleveland Museum of Art's [Performing Arts Series](#). The concert will feature contemporary Italian works for solo violin.

D'Orazio's professional relationship with Berio dates back to when the violinist was studying with Carlo Chiarappa, for whom *Sequenza VIII* was written. "In 1987, Berio decided to publish his *Divertimento for String Trio*, a work that was written in 1946. He asked my teacher to play the premiere, but Carlo had no time so he asked me if I wanted to perform it. I was so happy — I was 22 and giving a premiere by Luciano Berio."

After working on *Sequenza VIII* for nine months, D'Orazio called Berio and asked him if he could play the piece for him. Berio said yes, but told him that he would need to travel to the Salzburg Festival where he was composer in residence. The young violinist agreed, and although he was certain the meeting would take place in a very small room, that turned out not to be the case.

"Berio arranged for me to play in a theatre with about 50 people listening," D'Orazio said. "He was looking at the score while I was playing, and when I finished he came on the stage and very seriously said 'Bravo,' then went away. I thought he didn't like it at

all, and was quite upset, so I started putting my violin in its case. Then he came back and asked me what I was doing in two days. I told him nothing, and he said that he had just spoken to the Festival director, and if I could stay, I could perform the piece at the Festival. That was 27 years ago, and I think I've played it at least 300 times since then. But that is only 10 to 12 performances of it each year.”

When asked why he never tires of the piece, he quickly answered, “When you are in front of a masterpiece you always find something new in it. And when you know a piece so well you can organize the musical material to fit the acoustic of the hall.” He added that the mood of the occasion will also play a part in his performance, “so it's not like I've played the piece the same way 300 times. There has been an evolution of knowledge over time, and I have grown with age, so I do think that I play it better now than I did 27 years ago. Maybe that's not true, but I am convinced that it is,” he said with a laugh.

The professional relationship between the violinist and composer lasted for fifteen years. In addition to being Berio's performer of choice for *Sequenza VIII*, D'Orazio was also the soloist during the final concert that Berio conducted. (Click [here](#) to view a video of *Chorale su Sequenza VIII* for violin, horns and strings from that performance).

Francesco D'Orazio's repertoire includes works ranging from Baroque to classical and from romantic to contemporary music. A quick look at his [discography](#) shows the breadth of his musical undertakings. “I play everything,” he said. “I have a period instrument group that just released a new CD. I also enjoy performing Mozart and Beethoven.” The violinist has also given the Italian premieres of concertos by John Adams (*The Dharma at Big Sur*), Kaija Saariaho (*Graal théâtre*), Michael Daugherty (*Fire and Blood*), Aaron Jay Kernis (*Lament and Prayer*), and Michael Nyman (*Violin Concerto no. 1*).

I asked Francesco D'Orazio to talk about his program:

The Berio is a very strong work with an approach that comes from a long tradition of violin playing. It is Baroque in its structure, but it doesn't sound like it. *Sequenza VIII* — along with Salvatore Sciarrino's *Capricci* Nos. 1 and 4 (1975) — are probably the most important and successful works for solo violin written in the last 50 years. At first only one or two people were performing them, but now there are hundreds of violinists playing them both. What I like about Sciarrino's music is that there is an incredible modernity, but that modernity comes from the past, so in some ways his music is also Baroque.

Luciano Chessa, “Sarabanda” and “Corrente” come from the *Partita* for solo violin (1987–2013). I am playing two movements, but the piece is written so I am completely free to organize it however I wish. I can play all the movements or only two. I’ll premiere the complete work in Marseilles, France in March of 2017.

Ivan Fedele’s *Suite Francese II* (2010), is also based on Baroque dances, and Michele Dall’Ongaro’s musical material for *La Musica di E. Z.* (1999) is inspired by H.P. Lovecraft’s novel *The Music of Erich Zann*.

Nicola Sani’s *Raw* (2005) is completely different from all of the others on the program. It is made up of sounds like scratching, that are found in “noise,” another aspect of contemporary music that is important to know. There is also a chance for me to improvise during the piece.

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