

**CityMusic to play Viennese music
with horn soloist Elizabeth Freimuth**

by Mike Telin



Every New Year's day, people around the globe tune in to hear the Vienna Philharmonic perform music by Johann Strauss I and II. Beginning on Wednesday, December 7 at 7:30 pm in Christ Episcopal Church in Shaker Heights, guest conductor Stefan Willich will lead CityMusic Cleveland in five concerts featuring Viennese music by the Strauss family that you'd be likely to hear at the Musikverein.

The program will include Strauss the Junior's *Lagoon Waltz* and *Pizzicato Polka* and Strauss the Senior's *Zampa Galop* and *Radetzky March*. Check our [concert listings](#) page for times and venues of the four additional performances that run through Sunday.

The concerts will also include the Waltz from *Der Rosenkavalier* by the unrelated Richard Strauss, as well as that composer's *Horn Concerto No. 2*, featuring Elizabeth Freimuth as soloist. "I love the Second Horn Concerto," Freimuth said during a telephone conversation from Cincinnati, where she has served as principal horn of the Cincinnati Symphony since 2006. "When CityMusic asked me if I played the piece, I said, well, it's my favorite."

Written in 1942, the concerto followed its more well-known sibling by sixty years, and Freimuth noted that because Strauss wrote it at the age of 78, the piece embodies the composer's life and compositional experiences. "I feel that this concerto is very opera-based," she said. "I hear characters and the interaction between them being played out, which to me reflects all of the operas he had written, like *Rosenkavalier* and *Elektra*. He also had this wealth of material from

his tone poems, which are also very character-based. This concerto has all of those elements, and for that reason I love it.”

Freimuth referred to the 20-minute Concerto as a “monstrous” work that is equally complicated for the soloist and for the orchestra. “Nobody gets an easy ride with this piece,” the Pittsburgh native said. “Strauss famously approached the horn as a heroic voice, and the opening is exactly that: a hero’s introduction. During the first movement there are some figures that I think sound like a woman’s flirtatious giggle, and I have a vivid idea of those characters when I perform it. It’s a different experience from playing any other concerto.”

Following the intimate second movement, the Concerto ends in celebratory fashion. “At the end, Strauss adds the two horns that are in the orchestra to the mix — which sounds so heroic. It’s a lot of fun.”

Although Freimuth has performed the Concerto several times with piano, this week’s concerts will be the first time she has played it with orchestra. “It’s going to be phenomenal because of the way it is orchestrated — the voicing and the colors of all of the instruments makes a big difference in how it sounds. I’m looking forward to it.”

Freimuth first decided to learn the piece between her sophomore and junior years at the Eastman School of Music. “I was a live-in nanny in New York that summer and studying with Julie Landsman, who was at that time principal horn at the Metropolitan Opera. I knew that the Strauss Second was a piece that she knew so very well.”

To Freimuth’s surprise, when she went to the library at Eastman to check out the music, all that was available was a miniature score. “It was a wonderful way to learn the piece because I had to digest everything. Today with [IMSLP](#), the access to scores and parts is right at everyone’s fingertips, so it does not come as second nature for young musicians to study the score, unless they are told to. But I think it is the best way to learn a piece.”

Freimuth said that she and her Cincinnati Symphony colleagues are very fortunate. “We’re having major renovation done on the hall. Between the Symphony and the Pops — which is the same orchestra, although each has its own music director — we also play for the opera and the ballet. We look at it as a positive thing to have this variety. It’s a well-balanced, healthy situation.”

In addition to her performing career, Elizabeth Freimuth serves on the faculty of the Cincinnati Conservatory. She says that all of that, plus raising two young children, keeps her quite busy. "I have a very full life and I wouldn't want it any other way."

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