

French pianist Lucas Debargue to make Cleveland debut at Reinberger Hall February 3

by Mike Telin



During any music competition, it is not unusual for the jury and the critics to disagree as to who the winner should be. Such was the case during the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition, when the jury awarded French pianist Lucas Debargue the fourth prize, while his emotional expression and musical individuality earned him the Moscow Music Critics' Award as "the pianist whose

incredible gift, artistic vision, and creative freedom have impressed the critics as well as the audience."

On Friday, February 3 at 8:00 pm in Reinberger Chamber Music Hall at Severance Hall, [Lucas Debargue](#) will make his Cleveland recital debut with a program featuring Domenico Scarlatti's *Sonata in C*, K. 132, Frédéric Chopin's *Ballade No. 4*, Op. 52, Maurice Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*, and Nikolai Medtner's *Sonata No. 1 in f*, Op. 5.

Much has been made in the press about Debargue's circuitous route to the Tchaikovsky Competition. Suffice to say that the pianist did not spend his childhood in a practice room. Born in 1990 to a non-musical family, Debargue began studying piano at the age of eleven at the local music school in Compiègne, France. At fifteen he stopped studying piano and soon after joined a rock band. He began to work for his Baccalaureate at a local college, and at the age of seventeen he moved to Paris to pursue a degree in Arts and Literature at Paris Diderot University. For three years he gave up playing the piano altogether.

Debargue returned to the instrument in 2010 when he was asked to perform at the Fête de la Musique festival in Compiègne. At age twenty the pianist was invited to join the studio of Russian professor Rena Shereshevskaya at the École Normale de Musique de Paris 'Alfred Cortot.' Four years later, Lucas Debargue entered the famed Russian competition. About his performances *The Huffington Post* wrote: "There hasn't been a foreign pianist who has caused such a stir since Glenn Gould's arrival in Moscow, or Van Cliburn's victory at the Tchaikovsky Competition."

Due to scheduling conflicts, we were unable to speak with Lucas Debargue, who graciously agreed to answer questions by email.

Mike Telin: I like your program very much. What is it that you like about these works?

Lucas Debargue: The Scarlatti offers a dreamy and mellow introduction to Chopin (the ballade starts in C). Then the coda of the ballad anticipates the craziness of Ravel's triptych. The three pieces on the first half are like telling one story.

I am often more enthusiastic about the bridges that exist between the works (even when a long time separates them) and by the works themselves than by the question of styles or 'characteristics' of the composers.

MT: In a recent interview in The Telegraph, you said, "For me everything is in the written score, and it is my job to make that as clear as possible to the listener. That is the only thing that matters to me." How does that idea apply to the pieces you've chosen to play in Cleveland?

LD: I can only answer by playing music... If I were able to make it clear with words, I would have gone for literature instead of the piano!

MT: Having covered Cleveland's International Piano Competition during its last four cycles, and often questioned the choices of the jury, I was interested to see that you won the Critics' Award at Tchaikovsky in 2015, while only taking fourth place in the Competition. What qualities do you think critics are looking for during a contest that differ from what the jury pays attention to?

LD: I cannot make a generality out of critics. I think it depends very much on the people's mood. Jury members even differ in their opinions and often have difficulty all being convinced by the same musician.

I didn't play in this contest in order to satisfy jury members or critics. I did my best for my teacher and myself, for the sake of the work we carried on together for some time.

MT: How have your forays into the jazz and rock world influenced your playing of classical literature?

LD: I cannot tell... It's all in one... For me it's all about music-making. Only the frames change. I never played rock to play rock, jazz to play jazz, or classical to play classical.

MT: How do your studies of art and literature influence your playing?

LD: For some time I couldn't (I wouldn't) play and spent my days reading like crazy. Now it's part of my inner structure. But I would probably never be able to explain it.

MT: You took three years off from the piano. What effect did that have on you as a musician?

LD: I suppose a very good one. What could you tell by playing music if you're stuck at the piano for 10 hours a day for years? One needs to experience other things I guess, not only as hobbies. To be involved in human processes other than music-making is very healthy for creativity.

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