

Cleveland Orchestra: a conversation with *Midsummer Night's Dream* actor Itay Tiran

by Mike Telin



After three performances of Debussy's opera *Pelléas and Mélisande* last week, the spirit of theater continues at Severance Hall when Franz Welser-Möst leads The Cleveland Orchestra in Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with soprano Anya Matanovic, mezzo-soprano Emily Fons, and members of TCO's Youth Chorus.

The program, to be presented on Thursday at 7:30 pm, Sunday at 8:00 pm, and Sunday at 3:00 pm, also includes Hans Werner Henze's *Il Vitalino raddoppiato*, based on a chaconne by the Baroque composer Vitali, featuring violinist Julia Fischer.

"Shakespeare's play is full of fairies, dwarves, elves, and demons," Israeli actor Itay Tiran, who will be the narrator, said during a recent telephone conversation. "It takes us into the woods where the characters can express their secret urges and feelings. I think that Mendelssohn's enchanting music is the best platform to convey these feelings, and the narrator provides another way to present Shakespeare's beautiful poetry."

The actor noted that this concert is not intended to be a linear take on the play, or to provide insight into the characters — Oberon's famous servant and jester Puck, the fairies, the lovers Hermia and Lysander, "and that wonderful band of six laborers."

Tiran has previously teamed with Kurt Masur to present a production of the work in San Francisco, Paris, and in Tel Aviv — where he performed the narration in Hebrew. "For this one, Franz Welser-Möst is using a slightly different version."

Although he studied classical piano at the Petach Tikva Municipal Conservatory and

later majored in music at the Thelma Yellin High School of the Arts, over time Tiran shifted his artistic interests to drama. “My first love is music. I was educated as a pianist from the age of seven. But gradually I discovered that I lacked the skills to be a professional, meaning the talent and the discipline that is needed to devote hours and hours every day to maintain your technique. But music is a gift and it remains a companion — you can leave music, but it never leaves you.”

As an actor, Tiran said that his musical training remains a part of his professional life. “I’ve had the chance to use it onstage, in cinema, and in musicals — I played Mozart in Peter Schaffer’s *Amadeus*, and I played the saxophone in Joshua Sobol’s play *Ghetto*.”

Tiran said that through projects like the Mendelssohn, he has the opportunity to combine his two loves of acting and music. “It is important for the narrator to feel the music in order to portray the characters. You are another instrument in the orchestra — you are part of the structure and you have to feel it, so I’m very much looking forward to working with Franz Welser-Möst and the Orchestra. I also look forward to returning to Cleveland. I was there a few years ago with the Tel Aviv Cameri Theater’s production of *Hamlet*.”

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