

ChamberFest Cleveland: a profile of cellist Oliver Herbert

by Samantha Spaccasi



Cellist Oliver Herbert has been busy this year. “I just got back from a three-week tour with the Curtis Orchestra,” he said in a phone interview. The tour spanned the globe, with stops in New York, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Austria.

When he wasn’t touring, the San Francisco native was studying full-time at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Herbert also made his debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, playing Strauss’s *Don Quixote*.

“I was invited to play four family concerts with the Orchestra,” he said. “They wanted a young soloist because it was appropriate for the occasion. It was fantastic and really special to play with that group.” Oliver wasn’t the only Herbert in the orchestra that night, however: his father, David Herbert, is principal timpanist. “We played together in the same concert.”

Herbert comes from a musical family — his father formerly played with the San Francisco Symphony and his mother is a violinist. “I grew up with music in the house. I was lucky enough to have access to a lot of concerts and a lot of exposure to great music.”

The young musician began studying the violin under the tutelage of his mother at the age of three, but took an interest in the cello when he was five. “I was still playing violin at the time, but I remember seeing the cello and being struck by it, both visually and by the deeper sound,” he said. “After that, I told my parents I wanted to play the cello, but I was so small they told me I would have to wait.”

His parents were concerned about the size of the instrument for a number of reasons, one of which being that “if you choose to play the cello, you’re choosing to buy an extra seat on the airplane.” Eventually, Herbert’s parents relented and bought him his first instrument at the age of seven.

Adding to his already intense schedule, the 19-year-old musician will return to ChamberFest Cleveland this week for a performance on Thursday, June 15 at 7:30 pm in Mixon Hall. Herbert first performed at the Festival last year, but only for one week. “I jumped at the opportunity to go, because I’d heard such amazing things about ChamberFest and the artists who perform there,” he said. “It’s amazing to work with such experienced players. It was one of the best musical experiences I’ve ever had. I’m looking forward to coming back this year for the whole Festival.”

The cellist said he sees chamber music as a team sport, and he’s looking forward to being part of a talented team. “Chamber music is very selfless,” he said. “You have to give a lot of yourself and take what other people give you to create a performance that’s unique. Everyone is influencing each other, and everyone has to adjust. In the end, you come up with an organism which is special to that moment and combination of personalities.”

Herbert is one of the Festival’s youngest performers this year and is excited to play with experienced musicians as colleagues. “I’m used to being coached by older people,” he said. “I get a lot out of the rehearsal process and being around all these amazing artists, and to be held to the same standards as everyone else is a great challenge for me.”

For the cellist, ChamberFest is an event unlike any other of its kind, due to the caliber of performers and the programming. He thinks that those aspects are attractive to listeners. “The broader themes and motifs that run through the Festival tie together well. I think ChamberFest does a great job making the whole experience very exciting for the audience.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 13, 2017.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)