

Violinist Vadim Gluzman returns to Severance Hall

by Mike Telin



Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* has been part of The Cleveland Orchestra's repertoire since its founding in 1918. Mishel Piastro soloed in the first Cleveland Orchestra performance of the work on February 13, 1921 under the direction of Nikolai Sokoloff at the Hippodrome in New York City. Mischa Elman gave the first performance at a Subscription

Concert on October 23, 1924 at Masonic Auditorium under Sokoloff — who also conducted the first Severance Hall performance on October 20, 1932 with Jascha Heifetz as soloist. Artur Rodzinski first conducted the work on March 29, 1934 with Nathan Milstein as soloist, and Erich Leinsdorf first led the concerto on January 6, 1944 with Efrem Zimbalist.

What did these soloists have in common? They were all students of the great violin pedagogue Leopold Auer, to whom Tchaikovsky originally dedicated the concerto.

Vadim Gluzman will continue the Auer legacy when he performs the work on Thursday, May 2 at 7:30 pm in Severance Hall on the legendary [Auer Stradivarius](#) from 1690, the instrument for which Tchaikovsky wrote his famous concerto. The concert, under the direction of Michail Jurowski, also includes Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 11* ("The Year 1905"). The program will be repeated on Friday and Saturday at 8:00 pm and Sunday at 3:00 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

While neither the violin nor Auer ended up premiering the concerto, the violinist did revise the work, and that has now become the standard edition. "Mr. Auer played

through the concerto in his studio,” Vadim Gluzman said by telephone from his home in Chicago. “But he returned the score to Tchaikovsky saying thank-you, but no thank-you — he is to have said that the concerto was ‘un-violinistic.’ Of course Tchaikovsky was heartbroken, as he often was in his lifetime, and he waited two years before he rededicated the concerto to Adolph Brodsky, who premiered it in Vienna.”

Initial reception of the concerto was mixed. Critic Eduard Hanslick called it “long and pretentious,” writing that it “brought us face to face with the revolting thought that music can exist which stinks to the ear,” adding that “the violin was not played but beaten black and blue.”

“Poor Mr. Hanslick, wherever he is now he must be eating his shoe,” Gluzman said. “But going back to Auer, I need to mention that he redeemed himself in relationship to this concerto — we do know that he played it, and made his students learn it and play it.”



Gluzman said that when he performs the concerto, he often experiences a sense of nostalgia. Recounting a performance of it in Leipzig, he said, “As I often do after I am finished, I went into the hall to listen to the second half of the concert. I picked up a program and they had printed all sorts of trivia. It said that the first performance of this concerto with the Gewandhaus Orchestra was with Leopold Auer in 1896. I felt that a historical musical circle had just been completed because I had just played that same concerto, on that same violin, with that same orchestra. It was something very special.”

Like many violinists — including Joshua Bell, Gil Shaham, Vadim Repin, Midori, Sarah Chang, and Augustin Hadelich — Gluzman’s career was given a boost through the help of the Chicago-based [Stradivari Society](#). As explained on their website:

Founded in 1985 by the late Geoffrey Fushi and Mary Galvin, the Society is dedicated to the preservation and pursuit of excellence in classical music by identifying the world’s most promising young artists and uniting them with the superb rare, antique Italian instruments they need to help begin and sustain their professional careers thanks to generous patrons.

Gluzman clarified that the Society does not own the instruments. They act as what he described as a “matchmaker” between people who invest in great instruments like these, and young artists who are in need of them. “They have not only been kind to me, over the years they have become like a family. I have been fortunate to play on this instrument for 22 years. Over time my relationship with them has evolved and now I am also an artistic advisor to help choose the next generation of players.”

Although he was quite young when he received the famous violin, Gluzman clearly remembers the first time he held the instrument. “It was here in Chicago, at the headquarters of the Society,” he recalled. “As I was handed the fiddle — you know how sometimes you get the feeling that someone is watching you — I turned around and there was a huge portrait of Auer on the wall staring at me. Every time I go to the offices I always look at that portrait. It’s still in the same place.”

When it comes to great instruments, Gluzman firmly believes that they have their own personalities. “They are just as alive as we are. I know that I am not the same violinist that I was 22 years ago, nor is the instrument the same, dare I say.”

Still, the violinist noted that the instrument continues to possess the exceptionally dark lower register for which it is famous. “It has a cello-like personality. It’s telling how much a composer was writing with a certain instrument in mind. Tchaikovsky

heard Auer play many times, and it's interesting how much he uses that lower register in the concerto. It's also interesting that Glazunov wrote his concerto for Auer and for the same violin. And both concertos start on the G string, with the same note, in the same register."

Gluzman first learned Tchaikovsky's concerto when he was 16, and while he has now been playing it for 30 years, keeping performances fresh is not a problem. "The fact that I am still in love with it speaks to — for the lack of a better word — the degree of its greatness. It truly is a masterwork. Of course, the way that I play it has changed dramatically since I first learned it."

For Gluzman, the changes have come through the process of re-examining his musical decisions. "When I was younger I was always looking for the quickest satisfaction. Now, with all the incredible virtuosity and pyrotechnics in the concerto, I'm more drawn to the moments of serene beauty and lyricism. I think Tchaikovsky is second to none at producing absolutely extraordinary, glorious lines."

When it comes to performing, Gluzman said that in the end, it's all about being onstage with friends and sharing beautiful music with the audience. "Michail Jurowski and I have played many concerts together — I made my debuts in Berlin and Vienna with him. I can tell you that from my side, I am very much looking forward to being back in Cleveland. The combination of Tchaikovsky, The Cleveland Orchestra, Severance Hall, and Maestro Jurowski — I'm tickled just thinking about it. And the Shostakovich! You *will* see me in the audience during the second half, that I can promise."

One final piece of trivia. According to the Orchestra's archives, the complete Tchaikovsky *Violin Concerto* has received 138 performances, while movements from the work have been performed on 10 other occasions. So depending on how you do the math, Gluzman's performances will surpass either the 140 or 150 mark.

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