

Young Scandinavians to make their Blossom debuts this weekend

by Mike Telin



On Saturday, July 20 at 8:00 pm at Blossom Music Center, Finnish conductor Klaus Mäkelä and Swedish violinist Daniel Lozakovich will make their Cleveland Orchestra debuts. The program will feature Kodály's

Dances of Galánta, Bruch's *Violin Concerto No. 1*, and Sibelius' *Symphony No. 5*. Tickets are available [online](#).

While it is not unusual to have two people making their Cleveland Orchestra debuts on the same concert, it is somewhat of an anomaly to have both a conductor and soloist who are under 30 years of age. In fact, their combined ages total 41.

“The Cleveland Orchestra is one of the most important orchestras in the world. I have known them for a long time and I’m looking forward to making my debut with them at Blossom,” 23-year-old Klaus Mäkelä said by telephone from Helsinki. “It is a dream come true to play with such a legendary orchestra,” 18-year-old Daniel Lozakovich said by telephone from Geneva, adding “For me, there’s no better way to make a debut than with young energy, and when I found out that I would make mine with Klaus I was so happy.”

Mäkelä and Lozakovich have worked together before and they have a mutual admiration for each other’s talents. “Daniel is one of the most exciting and interesting soloists there is of any age,” Mäkelä said. “We did the Tchaikovsky Concerto together and I was

totally amazed with his playing. It's so natural and powerful in the way that he expresses things. I can't wait to see him again because he had so much fun the last time." Lozakovich returned the compliment. "When we did the Tchaikovsky with the Gothenburg Symphony I just knew that he would be number one. Of the younger conductors he's 100% my favorite."

Both conductor and violinist are easy conversationalists, and their passion for what they do comes through to the point that you wish you could all be in the same room together just talking about music. But young enthusiasm aside, Mäkelä and Lozakovich are serious students of their crafts.

[Klaus Mäkelä](#) serves as Principal Guest Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Artist in Association with the Tapiola Sinfonietta. In 2019 he also became Artistic Director of the Turku Music Festival. He will begin his duties as Chief Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Oslo Philharmonic during the 2020/21 season.

[Daniel Lozakovich](#) has recently performed with the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood, the National Philharmonic of Russia under Vladimir Spivakov, the Estonian National Symphony at the Montpellier Festival with Neeme Järvi, the Bavarian Radio Chamber Orchestra, and Cameristi della Scala. Upcoming dates include the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Boston Symphony with Andris Nelsons, and the Munich Philharmonic with Valery Gergiev.

I'll begin with my conversation with Klaus Mäkelä, who said that he was happy to present this program at Blossom, noting that the three pieces are connected through the same inspiration. "The *Dances of Galanta* are strongly influenced by folk music, and Sibelius' *Fifth Symphony* has a lot of folk elements in it, as does the Bruch *Violin Concerto*."

The conductor noted that the Kodály is a cycle of dances and in keeping with Hungarian tradition they begin slowly and build to a fast climax at the end. "Kodály was an important pedagogue and you can see his masterful orchestration in the score, which is carefully crafted down to the smallest detail. I feel very close to this piece because the Finnish language shares a lot of things in common with Hungarian — for example the emphasis on the first syllable or the down beat — and you can hear that in this piece."

Regarding the Bruch, Mäkelä said that "it is very traditional, but at the same time it is like no other violin concerto. It was written for Joseph Joachim, who gave advice on making some revisions. You can hear his personality in the piece."

Mäkelä especially looks forward to conducting the music of Sibelius, which he said “has a very special place in my heart. But interpreting his music can be difficult because he was a unique composer. His textures are his own and no other composer would write like that. At one point, he wanted to be a central European — he went to study in Berlin and Vienna and made trips to the States — he also wanted to be an international composer.”

Sibelius was writing his Fifth Symphony during an important time in Finnish and world history. “It was originally written in 1915 and then he revised it in 1916 and again in 1919, so basically he wrote it three times. And at that time, 1915 for example, Sibelius was playing close attention to what was happening in Europe and around the world, and I think the piece is a reaction to European modernism. When I conduct a work, I don’t only study the piece, I also like to know the context in which it was written. But it’s just a fascinating work and I could go on for two hours about it.”

Like his Finnish conducting colleague Susana Mälkki, Mäkelä also plays the cello. “In my heart, I’m a cellist,” he said, “and I think that is important because you can’t ask people to do something if you don’t know what it is like to do it.”

Mäkelä said that playing the cello keeps him musically fit, adding that he did a lot of orchestral playing when he was younger. “In a way, it was my second conducting school.

I studied with Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy for six years. At the same time I played in the Helsinki Philharmonic, the Finnish Radio Orchestra and the Opera. That was very important because I could see what conductors do — I could see what worked and what didn’t work. I also got to know different styles of rehearsing. How you spend rehearsal time is a key component of being a conductor.”

Five minutes after I finished my conversation with the conductor, I called Daniel Lozakovich, who described the Bruch as the perfect Romantic concerto. “The first movement has this grand feeling of always moving to something bigger, while the second is just pure beauty. It has so many magical moments where you can bring out so many colors. The third is a big celebration — a Hungarian dance. It was written for Joachim, who was Hungarian.”

Lozakovich is very close to the concerto, having played it many times and toured it with Valery Gergiev to Japan, China, and Korea. “There’s this saying among violinists that the Bruch is like a small Brahms concerto. But I remember that Maestro Gergiev told me that ‘it’s not a small Brahms concerto, it’s a big Bruch concerto.’ That really inspired me.”

The violinist took up the instrument at the age of six and made his concert debut when he was nine under Vladimir Spivakov in Moscow. He said it was his destiny to play the instrument. “From the first time I heard it I just fell in love with it,” he said. “I told my mom that I wanted to play the violin. My parents aren’t musicians, and when my mom heard that, she was shocked.”

Although it took a bit of convincing, eventually Lozakovich’s parents did buy him a half-size violin and a full-size bow, which he said was way too big, but he didn’t know there were different sizes.

“My mom was completely against it — she wanted me to become a tennis player. But my parents also wanted me to have a musical education, so they brought me to a music school. There I had to pick an instrument and I chose the violin. I told her that tennis is something I can only play until I’m thirty, but the violin is something I can play all of my life. So I convinced her.”

The next step was to find a teacher, which turned out to be more difficult than one would think. “No one wanted to take me — everyone said that I was too old. The violin is difficult, and since my parents weren’t musical, I should choose a different instrument. but I was very sure that I should play the violin.”

Eventually the determined Lozakovich found a teacher who “felt pity for me. She said it’s fine — I can take one more bad student. After the first lesson she called my mom and said that I was born to play the violin, but please buy him the right size instrument and bow. My mom told the teacher to ‘please make him stop after one month,’ but the teacher told her ‘just give me one month and I will show you.’”

Today Lozakovich studies in Geneva with Eduard Wulfson, who he said is like a grandfather to him. “I have another teacher, Josef Rissin, in Karlsruhe, Germany but there’s no airport there, so it’s easier to stay here and take the train.” We joke that there are a lot of worst places to be than Geneva.

In a promotional interview for Deutsche Grammophon, Lozakovich said that his goal is to become a *real* musician. I asked him to elaborate on that thought. “A real musician is someone who looks for the truth in music and does not imagine something else. You need to see yourself as the composer when you are studying a piece. When I am analyzing the music I need to feel how the composer wanted the tempi, phrasing, and the color. When I’m performing, I try to become the composer. And at that time, whatever I am performing is the only music in the world to me.”

When he has the time, Lozakovich still enjoys playing tennis. Is there a particular professional player that he follows? “Roger Federer,” he answers without missing a beat. “I watched the Wimbledon final the other day — it was such a hard match.”

The violinist has also competed in many chess tournaments. “I stopped when I became more dedicated to music, but I did play professionally until I was eleven. I still play. In fact, I play with my teacher and his neighbor, Vladimir Kramnik, who is a former world champion. So there are always chess boards around.”

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