

Akron Symphony to open season with an all-Russian program

by Mike Telin



When inclement weather forced the cancelation of the Akron Symphony's January 2019 concert, they were fortunate that both guest conductor and soloist were available to open the ASO's 2019-2020 season this weekend. The following preview, originally published in January, has been edited for content.

There are certain pieces of music that, no matter when they were written, always sound new. And in the eyes

and ears of [Alexander Korsantia](#), Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No. 3* is one that holds that distinction. "It is an eternally fun concerto," the pianist said during an interview. "It was written almost one hundred years ago but it still feels like it is aiming to the future."

On Saturday, September 21 at 8:00 pm in E.J. Thomas Hall, the Georgian-born pianist will perform that concerto with the Akron Symphony under the direction of guest conductor Benjamin Zander. The all-Russian program will also include Glinka's Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Mussorgsky's "Dawn on the Moscow River" from *Kovantchina*, and Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4*. Tickets are available [online](#).

When asked what he finds so attractive about the Prokofiev Concerto, the 1995 Gold Medal winner at the Rubinstein Competition quickly answered, "Its diversity. This concerto, probably more than any other by Prokofiev or any great composer, just covers a colossal amount of space in history. He is using an array of techniques from earlier music, like the polyphonic music of the Baroque, and the minuets and gavottes

of the Classical era. Haydn is the champion of those dances in the 18th century, but in the 20th century that is Prokofiev.”



Like several of the composer’s works, Korsantia said this concerto has an elegant, older feel to it. “Somehow, more than many other composers, he is able to embrace the full value of those older ‘parents.’ It’s something that, as a performer and music lover, I appreciate more and more as time goes by.”

The pianist noted that Prokofiev was also adept at writing variations. “It’s like he had so many ideas and wanted to show all of them, but this is not an aggressive pushing of them. It’s a harmonious and wholesome piece, and that’s why it became so popular.”

Although Korsantia has performed the concerto with Benjamin Zander, Saturday’s performance will be his Akron Symphony debut. “It’s a lot of fun for the orchestra. I think it’s one of the most virtuosic orchestral parts in the piano concerto repertoire. It is extremely elaborate and is written very well, but requires true virtuosity from everybody.”

When he’s not touring, Korsantia serves on the faculty at the New England Conservatory, and is passionate about teaching young people to think outside the box.

“That’s a big part of my work, though it doesn’t mean I am against conservative views about older music. But I think that every spiritual quest, including a musical one, should start from the beginning, and all the stages should be understood.”

Speaking philosophically, the pianist said that music is just like life. “Music is made to create a full experience, and our lives are not only about beauty — there is the angelic and the demonic. Sometimes it’s very uncomfortable, sometimes it’s blissful. If you’re just looking for a lighter experience, it’s much better to just focus on the beauty and enjoy the upper layer. But music is capable of so much more.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 16, 2019.

Click here for a printable copy of this article
[Return to the Front Page.](#)