

## Stefan Willich returns to CityMusic for December cycle of concerts

by Daniel Hathaway



German conductor Stefan Willich, founder of the World Doctors Orchestra, got to know Ronald and Eugenia Strauss, founders of CityMusic Cleveland, in 2011 and they immediately hit it off. “They told me about their orchestra in Cleveland, and after lots of mutual admiration, we decided to do something together.” As a result, Willich was invited to Cleveland to lead a set of concerts. “It’s been great,” Willich said in a telephone conversation from Berlin. “I love the musicians and I love the audiences, so ever since, I’ve been back regularly to Cleveland for the December concerts.”

This time around, Willich’s program is called “Fire and Ice,” and will be presented in four different venues around town between December 12 and 15. “It’s a nice

blend of pieces. Some are fiery, like Haydn’s *Symphony No. 49* and de Falla’s *Ritual Fire Dance*, and some have a wintry atmosphere, like Suk’s *Meditation on St. Wenceslas*, Corelli’s *Christmas Concerto*, and Mozart’s *Sleigh Ride*.”

Willich likes CityMusic’s peripatetic habit of repeating programs several times around the region. “The venues are so different, and there’s always something new to tease out in the music. There’s a lot of attraction in repeating repertoire — George Szell was famous for doing that with The Cleveland Orchestra — and different audiences react differently. I like that.”

Stefan Willich moves easily between the worlds of medicine and music. A cardiologist and researcher by training, he’s also served as president of the Music

Conservatory Hanns Isler in Berlin. He founded the [World Doctors Orchestra](#) in 2008, leading the ensemble in a concert at Severance Hall in 2009, in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the 2010 World Health Summit in Berlin, and in Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony in Washington, D.C. in 2011 to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

"The first concert in 2008 was an attempt to see if we could play together on an international level and support health care charities. We now have 1,500 members in 50 countries, and hold three or four sessions each year," he said.

"There's a lot of commitment on the part of our members. They use their own vacation time and pay their own travel and lodging. We have an orchestra manager here in Berlin, but local organizers play an important role. Our members propose venues, then they take over a lot of the regional arrangements, which can add up to well over a year's commitment."

What's the connection between medicine and music? "The boring explanation is always a sociological one," Willich said. "Many doctors come from bourgeois families, they learn an instrument, and the likelihood is that they will continue playing. However, I think there's a lot of interaction there, particularly on an emotional level.

"In medicine, you deal with all kinds of emotions in your daily practice, and I think that music and art in general have the same blend of emotions. And music provides a soothing influence that complements your normal daily medical activity. Both music and medicine are very precise. Medicine is a natural science where you apply therapies according to very clear mechanisms of action, and a musical piece is like a mathematical structure, but in both you need subjective interpretation. As a musician, you want to reach your audience, and in medicine you want to build up an empathic doctor/patient relationship."

*Photo by Janet Century.*

*Stefan Willich leads CityMusic Cleveland in "Fire and Ice," including Rossini's Overture to Cinderella, Suk's Meditation on St. Wenceslas, Haydn's Symphony No. 59 ("Fire"), Corelli's Christmas Concerto, Op. 6, No. 8, Mozart's Sleigh Ride (German Dances, K. 605), Humperdinck's Gingerbread Waltz, Tchaikovsky's Prayer from Mozartiana, and Falla's Ritual Fire Dance this week. Concerts take place on Thursday, December 12 (7:30 pm at the Temple-Tifereth Israel), Friday, December 13 (7:30 pm at Lakewood Congregational Church), Saturday, December 14 (8:00 pm*

*at the Shrine Church of St. Stanislaus), and Sunday, December 15 (4:00 pm at St. Noel Church in Willoughby Hills). Freewill offering at each performance.*

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