

Tuesday Musical to present London's Academy of St. Martin in the Fields

by Mike Telin



Although it is common to hear performances of Baroque and some classical period orchestral repertoire performed without a conductor, you don't often think of a Paganini violin concerto or a Brahms symphony being performed without one. Think again.

On Tuesday, February 25 at 7:30 pm at E.J. Thomas Hall, violinist Joshua Bell will lead the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields in performances of Paganini's *Violin Concerto No. 1* and Brahms' *Symphony No. 4*. Presented by Akron's Tuesday Musical, the evening will be preceded by a conversation with Academy musicians at 6:30 pm. Tickets are available [online](#).

The concert is part of the Ensemble's 20-day, 16-concert North American tour. "We're very excited to be coming back to Akron," Academy violinist Harvey de Souza said by phone from Bethesda, Maryland. "This is probably the biggest group that we have toured. I think there are 54 of us, which for us is very large."

De Souza, who joined the Academy in 1993, said the Brahms symphony is a lovely piece and a joy to play. It's also the largest work they have ever taken on tour. "It's exciting for us because it's the first time we've tackled a symphony without a conductor, but we're loving it. And I don't think the Paganini violin concerto is ever done without a conductor. It's so tricky, and the soloist has enough to do without being worried about the orchestra."



The violinist noted that the experience has put a completely different emphasis on the group's approach to orchestral playing. "The only way it works is to have the attitude that you're playing chamber music — everybody has to be listening and engaged all the time. What's great about this is that everyone needs to take ownership and everybody needs to be a leader, no matter where you are sitting in the orchestra."

Although today's audiences have become accustomed to hearing Brahms symphonies performed by large forces, the symphonies were actually premiered by much smaller ensembles. "We think of Brahms as being lush, almost Mahler-esque," de Souza said, "though his music is actually fairly transparent, particularly the Fourth symphony. But as traditions have evolved over time there are bigger crescendos, bigger climaxes, and more rubatos."

And what is Joshua Bell's approach to the piece? "I just love it," de Souza said. "At the first rehearsal he told us that he wanted to avoid the traditional pitfalls of taking time in the same old places. He said that when he was studying the score it was obvious that Brahms wrote things out so beautifully that you don't have to do a lot to it."

Joshua Bell was appointed Music Director of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields in 2011, and is only the second person to hold that position since Sir Neville Marriner created the orchestra in 1958. What people may not know is that the Academy was originally formed as a conductor-less ensemble.

"We collectively decided to return to our roots," de Souza said. "Of course what Josh has done is to expand the repertoire by taking on Beethoven symphonies and now Brahms. And we are having so much fun."

De Souza photo by Benjamin Ealovega.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com February 21, 2020.

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