

ChamberFest Cleveland: a conversation with Shai Wosner

by Mike Telin



After a long wait, the next edition of ChamberFest Cleveland will kick off on Wednesday, June 9 at 7:00 pm at The Grove Amphitheatre in Mayfield. Admission is free, but [reservations](#) are required. The program, titled “Legends,” will include Antonín Dvořák’s *Legends*, Enrique Granados’ *Sonata for Violin and Piano*, Paul Wiancko’s *American Haiku*, and Franz Schubert’s *Trio No. 2 in E-flat*.

The evening will begin with pianist [Shai Wosner](#)’s arrangement of the Dvořák performed by clarinetist Franklin Cohen, violist Dimitri Murrath, and Wosner, who will be making his ChamberFest debut.

Originally written for piano four-hands, the ten pieces that comprise the work were later arranged for orchestra by the composer. I asked the pianist why he decided to make his own arrangement, and why he chose this particular instrumentation?

Shai Wosner: I love these pieces. I play them a lot in the four-hand version, but during the pandemic I missed playing them with other people. I decided it would be nice to spend time with them in another way, so I reworked them into a combination that I particularly like. I was supposed to do a tour with this combination — clarinet, viola, and piano — so I was spending a lot of time with those colors.

Even though *Legends* was orchestrally conceived, I’ve always thought it would work well as chamber music. There are ten pieces in total but I’ve arranged five that are more conversational in nature.

Closing the program, Wosner will be joined by violinist Itamar Zorman and cellist Zlatomir Fung for a performance of Franz Schubert's Trio No. 2 in E-flat.

Mike Telin: You are somewhat of an authority on Schubert — how did your passion for his music develop?

SW: It's hard to explain, but I think that all of the great composers that we revere today added to the emotional vocabulary of our understanding of music. They were the first to express certain things and did that in a way that could not be more personal. I think this is true in the case of Schubert. The emotion you feel in his music was not seen before him and I don't think that anybody has managed to surpass him.

It's that feeling of timelessness and that incredible link between hope and optimism, yet at the same time there are some of the darkest undercurrents. A lot of the time his music seems unassuming on the surface, almost naïve, and then when you least expect it, it reveals these unbelievable powers — it becomes a massive storm. So it's that contrast between the lovely tunes and the powerful emotions that are underneath all of that. It's very much like real life.

On June 11 the pianist will join forces with violinists Itamar Zorman and Diana Cohen, violist Dimitri Murrath, and cellist Zlatomir Fung for Ernő Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 2 in e-flat.

MT: E-flat minor — six flats scare me.

SW: What's interesting is that most of the time he only uses three of them — he probably didn't want to deter people too much.

The piece is extremely beautiful, the kind that may not be familiar to most listeners, but also the kind that makes you think, 'oh, I like this piece.' It's a little bit of a guilty pleasure. It's not indulgent, but it plays with its own pleasures. Some moments are like an ultra-fancy dessert and in other moments it's quite stormy.

It's delightful and beautiful in unexpected ways. It sets itself up to be a big symphonic statement with orchestral textures, and yet in the end it is quite intimate, especially for a piano quintet — most tend to be quite imposing.

MT: Now for the obligatory question: what did you do during COVID?

SW: I did make a couple other arrangements, but honestly, I felt extremely lucky to be a pianist. We have an embarrassment of riches in terms of repertoire and more than any

other instrument we can just sit down and play almost anything without needing other instruments to join us.

Of course, playing with other people was something I missed tremendously, and I've heard that from so many musicians — in some ways even before missing the audience. But such a vast repertoire was a special thing to have in such extreme circumstances.

THIS WEEK'S CHAMBERFEST CALENDAR

Except where noted, all events are outdoors at The Grove Amphitheatre, 425 N. Commons Blvd., Mayfield, and are free, but [reservations](#) are required.

JUNE 9 - WEDNESDAY - 7:00 pm — *Legends* — Antonín Dvořák's Legends (arranged by Shai Wosner), Enrique Granados' Sonata for Violin and Piano H.127, Paul Wiancko's American Haiku and Franz Schubert's Trio No. 2 in E-flat, D. 929.

JUNE 11 - FRIDAY - 7:00 pm — *Blue Dress* — Maurice Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello, Carbarkapa Maljokovic's Sonata for Four Clarinets, Missy Mazzoli's Vespers for violin, and Ernő Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 2 in e-flat, Op. 26.

JUNE 12 - SATURDAY - 7:00 pm — *Rambunctious Fun* — Béla Bartók's Selected Duos for Two Violins, Alexander Zemlinsky's Clarinet Trio, Op. 3, Franz Schubert's — Lebensstürme: Allegro in a, D. 947 and Folk Songs from Around the World: Lamma Bada (Classic Arabic, arr. Dave Morgan), To Yasemi (Traditional Cypriot, arr. Dave Morgan), Appalachian Suite (Traditional U.S., arr. Dave Morgan) and Sephardic Songs (Traditional Ladino, arr. Paul Ferguson).

JUNE 13 - SUNDAY - 11:00 am - Lawn Concert — *Bach and More* — Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber's Passacaglia from the Rosary Sonatas, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson's Lamentations suite and J.S. Bach's E major Partita. Private yard on Guilford Rd., Cleveland Hts. Free, but [reservations](#) required. Lawn chairs welcome.

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