

## Cellist Alisa Weilerstein to give Cleveland premiere of Joan Tower's *A New Day*

by Mike Telin



There are a few reasons why this week's program from Franz Welser-Möst and The Cleveland Orchestra is particularly special. One, it marks the first time that the ensemble will return in full force to Severance Music Center since March 2020.

Two, the concerts will mark the final performances of Joela Jones as the Orchestra's principal keyboard, finishing up a 54-season tenure. Click [here](#) to read an interview.

And three, the program will feature Alisa Weilerstein in the Cleveland premiere of Joan

Tower's *A New Day* for cello and orchestra.

The concerts, titled "New Beginnings," take place on Thursday, October 14 at 7:30 pm and Sunday, October 17 at 3:00 pm, and will also include Richard Strauss' *Macbeth* and Sergei Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 5*. Click [here](#) for ticket information.

*A New Day* was commissioned for Alisa Weilerstein by The Colorado Music Festival, The Cleveland Orchestra, The Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and The National Symphony Orchestra. As Joan Tower says in her composer note,

*I wrote the music with love to Jeff, my partner of 48 years, who turned 94 in April of 2021. While composing this piece, I realized that our long time together was getting shorter, becoming more and more precious with each new day...*

"We did not know each other before this," Weilerstein said by telephone from her home in San Diego. "It was spearheaded by Peter Oundjian and the Colorado Music Festival who asked Joan to write a concerto for me. And luckily for all of us, she obliged."

Weilerstein said that while she and Tower did correspond over the past year, it was “a bit more social” until the music arrived. “I got the score in March of 2021, which was actually pretty luxurious in terms of the timing, and I immediately fell in love with it.”



Once she began learning the concerto, Weilerstein said that she and Tower engaged in some “really nice back-and-forth conversations about the piece.” As the July premiere approached, she also sent videos of her playing the solo part to Tower in order to receive feedback, and to save time once they were together in Boulder.

“She’s an amazing human being and has a wonderful sense of humor — we just had the best time that week. She is coming to Cleveland and I’m looking forward to seeing her again.”

Weilerstein said that the concerto is a celebration of life — a love letter to Tower’s husband and partner of 48 years that describes a day that they spend together in their home.

“The audience doesn’t need to know anything that I’m about to say to enjoy the music. That’s one of the great things about Joan’s music — it’s such a profound language, but also a very accessible language, so anyone listening to it for the first time would absolutely get it and understand it.

“The first movement, ‘Daybreak,’ is about the morning. The second is called ‘Working Out’ — physically and mentally. The third is nearly a cadenza for the cello called ‘Mostly Alone,’ how they would be together but apart — being in the same space, but

doing their own work. And the last movement is called ‘Into the Night.’ For me it’s the most interesting because of its rhythmic and harmonic variety. That’s just a personal thing and audience members may have a different opinion. She writes beautifully for the cello, and the orchestration is wonderful — she knows exactly what she’s doing.”

Weilerstein, who is a Clevelander, said that she’s “honored” to be part of this week’s concerts. “I know Joela very well so it’s kind of a bittersweet moment. And Richard Weiss, who is her husband, was my teacher for seven years, from the time I was eleven until I was eighteen. I know he’s going to be playing this week, and I’m happy to be part of it.”

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 13, 2021.*

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