

Geneva Lewis & Gabriel Martins make ChamberFest debuts

by Mike Telin



Violinist [Geneva Lewis](#) has been hailed as “clearly one to watch” by Musical America. She is the recipient of a 2021 Avery Fisher Career Grant, and Grand Prize winner of the 2020 Concert Artists Guild Competition. Other honors include Kronberg Academy’s Prince of Hesse Prize and being named a Finalist at the 2018 Naumburg Competition, a Performance Today Young Artist in Residence, and Musical America’s New Artist of the Month.

Cellist [Gabriel Martins](#)’ accolades include the Concert Artists Guild – Young Classical Artists Trust Grand Prize, the Sphinx Competition Gold

Medal, the David Popper International Cello Competition Gold Medal, and the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians Silver Medal, to name only a few. He has performed at the Wigmore, Carnegie, and Merkin Halls, 92nd Street Y, the

Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, and with the Houston, Indianapolis, Memphis, Pacific, and Phoenix Symphony Orchestras. *The Strad Magazine* declared his New York City recital debut to be “flawlessly played” and “a deeply moving experience.”

Later this week the two “rising stars” will make their [ChamberFest](#) Cleveland debuts. We caught up with Lewis and Martins by Zoom and began by asking how the ChamberFest invitations came about.

Geneva Lewis: ChamberFest is something that I’ve wanted to be part of for quite a while because the music making is so incredible. I remember my manager asking me about

things that I'd be interested in, and ChamberFest was at the top of the list. I was excited to hear from Diana Cohen, although not sure who reached out to whom first. Either way, I'm happy to be a part of it.

Gabriel Martins: Mine is a little bit different. Diana reached out to Miriam Fried, who is Geneva's teacher and who I work with a lot, and asked for recommendations for cellists and I guess my name was brought up.

MT: What excites you about the repertoire?

GL: Something I'm looking forward to is the Schnittke *Piano Quintet*. It's a piece I just recently discovered, but I did perform it last month. It was an inspiring situation — I was playing second violin and the first violin was Gidon Kremer. He knew Schnittke very well — he gave the Moscow premiere and recorded it. It was amazing to work with Kremer and I'm excited to play it with my Cleveland colleagues.

MT: What about Schnittke's music do you find attractive?

GL: There is so much power, and emotional content, and the sheer darkness in so much of what he writes. But his music has some humorous aspects as well. Although there are fewer of those in this piece.

MT: You're also playing Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Clarinet Quintet.

GL: I don't know a lot of his music but I have played the clarinet quintet before. It's a beautiful piece and very natural — it feels like home.

MT: Gabriel, what repertoire are you excited to play?

GM: The first piano quintet by Fauré. It's simply a beautiful piece. It's very natural and elegant, and I think it will be a joy to play. On the Sunday concert I'll play another French work — *Three Pieces for cello and piano* by Nadia Boulanger, which I look forward to very much.

The only piece I've played by George Walker is the slow movement from his first string quartet, so *Music for Three* will be an interesting adventure for me.

MT: What made you want to play an instrument?

GM: For me it was the decision of my mother. She wanted me to be involved in music and it just so happened that the cello classes they were offering at the university were the only ones that didn't conflict with my basketball practice.

I don't think my parents were expecting it to turn into my career, but probably in my early teenage years, I started to develop a passion for it. And that carried me to where I am today. My parents are both very supportive.

GL: It was similar for me. I have two older siblings, and they wanted all of us to play an instrument, mostly because they both love classical music. They are not musicians but they thought that being involved in music was an important part of a child's education.

I was torn between the violin and the cello — my brother played violin and my sister played cello. I wanted to play both and I don't remember how, but I ended up with the violin.

MT: Both of you have entered and done well in many competitions. How did those experiences advance your careers?

GM: I think that music competitions have become almost a required part of the music world for young artists. There are a few people who were able to make a career without that, but it's rare.

For most of us a competition is where you have an opportunity to be heard. The prizes and the rankings are incredibly subjective, so my method was always to enter as many of them as possible then hope for some of the competitions to work out. You're not going to win first prize at the majority of them. So for me, they were an opportunity to be heard. And that resulted in more concert opportunities.

MT: Can you talk about the Sphinx Competition?

GM: Yes! Winning the Sphinx Competition was huge for me. But it's funny — I entered three times: the first year I won third prize, the second year I won second prize, and the third year I won first.

The Sphinx Organization is amazing because the cash prizes are quite significant — I was able to use that to purchase a fine instrument which is essential for us performing artists. Especially when you play with an orchestra you really need a great instrument. So they were incredibly helpful in that regard.

GL: I can relate to what Gabe is saying. I found that the process of going through a competition was very helpful in terms of the intense preparation that is required — getting everything as polished as possible. And then having the opportunity to perform in a high pressure situation was great for developing the tools that I now use in my professional life.

The Concert Artist Guild has been very helpful. I have so much to thank them for. I think that any success that has come in the past few years has been because of them.

MT: When did you realize you needed management? Geneva, I know you're with Bill Capone at Arts Management Group.

GL: It started with Concert Artist Guild, they were wonderful for preparing me for what the artist/manager dynamic is like. look for. Working with my main manager there — Tim Mar — was wonderful, he was a great advocate.

I'm fortunate to now be working with Bill, he knows everything and everyone so well. He also loves and really knows music. And he has a lot of integrity. So I'm thankful to be working with him.

GM: I'm with Opus 3 — Pat Winter and Emily McClean are wonderful.

MT: How did both of you make it through the past couple of years when everything was shut down?

GL: One thing that made it much nicer is that for a lot of it Gabe and I were roommates. Aside from just having a great time together and socially surviving it, we did a lot of virtual concerts together — and separately, but I preferred the collaborative ones. A lot of it was making your own opportunities in the virtual sphere. And taking advantage of the time to step away from the instrument, and having the time to just focus on the instrument and practice without deadlines.

GM: It was and still is a hard time for musicians, but we both tried to make the most of it. We were lucky to both sign with Concert Artists Guild around the start of the pandemic, so we had a lot of things to be working on: curating programs, practicing repertoire, and online concerts.

I made some new recordings and started composing and arranging a little bit more. We tried to keep busy but we're very glad to be back playing real concerts again.

MT: What took you down the arranging path?

GM: We have some great repertoire for cello: the Bach suites, the Beethoven Sonatas, and the big concertos of Dvořák and Elgar. But when you're stuck at home during the pandemic and you have nothing to do, I started to think that maybe I could bring some new things to the repertoire. So I started exploring a lot of the solo violin pieces.

And Geneva and I like to play concerts together — we have many duo violin/cello concerts scheduled. But the repertoire for that combination is extremely limited. So I started arranging a few things for violin and cello as well.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 21, 2022.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)