

## Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra: Concerto Competition winner Elena Ziegler

by Mike Telin



For a young musician, winning a concerto competition is always an honor. And performing that concerto with an orchestra is a moment to cherish. “I’ve played many concertos before with piano, but this is my first time with an orchestra and I’m enjoying it a lot,” Elena Ziegler said.

On Friday, May 3 at 8:00 pm at Severance Music Center, Ziegler will perform Lalo’s *Cello Concerto* with the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra. Under the direction of Daniel Reith, the program also includes Valerie Coleman’s *Umoja* and Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 4*. Tickets are available [online](#).

I reached the Copley High School junior by telephone and began our conversation by congratulating her on winning the competition and asking how she came to choose the Lalo.

Elena Ziegler: My teacher recommended it to me. I listened to it and liked it. It’s interesting that Lalo is a French composer, but his music sounds Spanish.

*Mike Telin: Who is your teacher?*

EZ: Dmitry Kouzov, who teaches at Oberlin. This is my second year with him.

MT: Back to the Lalo, the *Cello Concerto* is probably his most famous work — aside from his *Symphonie espagnole* — and it’s not easy. What are some of its technical challenges?

EZ: Sometimes the rhythm is a little hard because there are a lot of places where you can take time, so you have to make sure that you time it correctly. And some of the fast passages are also hard. But it's got some beautiful melodies as well.

I like the Spanish style — it sounds *Carmen*-esque with a strong beginning, and then goes into a second theme that I really like.

*MT: It's scored for a huge orchestra. What did it feel like during the first rehearsal in Severance Hall? That must have been fun.*

EZ: Yeah. The sound is so different from playing in a smaller concert hall or in your house, and that's really fun.

*MT: It's not short either, like 30 minutes. Are you playing it from memory?*

EZ: Yes.

*MT: Was it difficult to memorize?*

EZ: No, I don't think it was too hard. There are some spots where you have to be careful because they're tricky, especially during the main theme, but other than that it was pretty easy.

*MT: How are the rehearsals going?*

EZ: I'm having a lot of fun and I've been talking to Mr. Reith about how to time some of the places. I think it's going well.

*MT: So you're enjoying yourself.*

EZ: Oh, I'm enjoying it a lot. It's different in the fact that you have to listen to everybody to make sure that you're in the right spot. And then, having all those people behind you is really exciting and playing in the hall is really exhilarating. So yes, I'm enjoying it.

*MT: What do you enjoy about being in COYO?*

EZ: All the different repertoire and the people. I look forward to it every week, because everyone there is super passionate about music, and it kind of drives me forward to be more passionate about it too.

*MT: Do you enjoy working with members of The Cleveland Orchestra?*

EZ: Definitely. We had a side-by-side a couple weeks ago, and that was really fun.

*MT: Do you have a specific memory that stands out to you?*

EZ: All the projects have been really great, but I would say *Romeo and Juliet* last year.

*MT: I know you come from a musical family because I spoke to your sister last year.*

EZ: Yes! I was told that this is the first time that sisters have been back-to-back concerto competition winners. I take a lot of inspiration from my older sister. She really drives me to do more with music.

*MT: When you're not playing the cello, what do you enjoy doing?*

EZ: I'm actually an artist — I draw and paint. I also like hiking and reading.

*MT: I noticed that you have won some competitions for your painting.*

EZ: Yeah, it's kind of a hobby for me so I think I'll continue doing it just as a fun thing to do on the side.

*MT: You said that you like to read — do you have a specific genre that you enjoy?*

EZ: I like reading mythology like Greek, Norse, and Egyptian. I actually like history, so I read a lot of that as well.

*MT: Elena, thanks so much for talking, and congratulations. It will be nice to hear the Lalo — I think it should be played more often.*

EZ: Thank you — I really like the piece.

*Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra photo by Roger Mastroianni.*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 1, 2024*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)