

The Cleveland Orchestra revives Summers at Severance series

by Stephanie Manning



Four years on from pandemic disruptions, some ensembles are still working on returning to 100% of their pre-2020 programming. Case in point from this summer: The Cleveland Orchestra, which is reviving its Summers at Severance series for the first time in five years.

“As we’ve been coming back to ‘normal,’ there is definitely an appetite for more of

our classical offerings during the summer,” artistic administrator Michael Gandlmayr said in a recent interview. While the Orchestra’s home at this time of year is unquestionably Blossom Music Center, performing a few times at Severance Music Center gives audiences more options to enjoy their programming. “It’s also a great opportunity for us to see some new and returning faces, both on the podium as well as soloists.”

During the initial run of Summers at Severance between 2014 and 2019, the concerts ran for about one hour, with opportunities before and after to eat, drink, and socialize on the terrace. While the pre-concert cocktails remain in 2024, the three Thursday programs have now been lengthened to resemble a regular subscription concert.

“That way, it feels like a more substantial offering for our core audiences as well as the conductors and soloists coming to join us — so they also get a full Cleveland Orchestra experience,” Gandlmayr explained.

Getting that full experience feels especially relevant given that multiple performers will be making their debuts. On Thursday, July 11, conductor Oksana Lyniv makes her first appearance with the Orchestra, while pianist Inon Barnatan — last heard with the group at Blossom in 2009 — makes his first appearance at Severance.

“As we were developing the program, we very quickly gravitated towards the music of Boris Liatoshynsky,” Gandlmayr said, referencing Lyniv’s efforts to platform composers

from her home country of Ukraine. Liatoshynsky, an influential 20th-century figure, taught a number of contemporary Ukrainian composers. His tone poem *Grazhyna* is paired with two suites: from Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird* and Leoš Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Bartanan then joins the group for Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. "These works all have some extra-musical components to them in terms of storytelling, and also really rich histories and connections in terms of the geographical region," Gandlmayr said.

Up next on July 2 is another conductor debut — this time Petr Popelka, recently appointed at the Vienna Symphony. The evening features Antonín Dvořák's *Symphony No. 6* along with works by César Franck and Erich Korngold.

"I see it as a really fantastic program for the horn," Gandlmayr said. "Franck's *Le Chasseur maudit*, which is the story of an accursed huntsman, starts with these really big horn calls, like a hunting horn. And in Korngold's *Violin Concerto*, there's this really fantastic horn melody in the final movement."

Violinist James Ehnes returns to play with the Orchestra for the first time since 2016. The Korngold has "a sort of glamor and glitziness about it that's really intoxicating," Gandlmayr said. "And James Ehnes really plays it just about better than anyone, I'd say."

Finally, music director Franz Welser-Möst will lead the group on August 15 in a preview of their upcoming European tour, featuring Mozart's *Symphony No. 35* and Bruckner's *Symphony No. 4*. "I think it's a great opportunity to showcase the orchestra in this repertoire in which they really shine," Gandlmayr said. The Orchestra is gearing up to celebrate Bruckner's 200th anniversary by playing his fourth symphony in Austria — just a few steps away from the house where he was born.

"Interestingly, a couple of years ago, we played at the St. Florian Monastery, which is where he's entombed," Gandlmayr added. "So it does feel like, in a maybe rather morbid way, a full circle moment."

He reiterated that while Blossom remains the Orchestra's summer focus, the University Circle neighborhood is an important part of their identity as well. "We still rehearse here during the summer, and we very much intend to continue investing in this way to have audiences also come to Severance Music Center," he said.

And if the weather holds: "Hopefully we'll have some nice nights out on our terrace outside and enjoy all the beauty that's around us."

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