

## Cleveland Orchestra begins Beethoven Piano Concerto Cycle

by Mike Telin



Since making his Cleveland Orchestra debut at Blossom Music Center in 2009, Augustin Hadelich has gone on to become a Cleveland audience favorite. Last November, the violinist was greeted with a standing ovation when he walked on stage to play the Tchaikovsky Concerto.

On Wednesday, November 6 at 7:30 pm, Hadelich will return to Severance Music

Center to join pianist Igor Levit and cellist Julia Hagen for a performance of Beethoven's *Triple Concerto*. Under the direction of Franz Welser-Möst, the evening will also include Levit in the composer's *Piano Concerto No. 3*. The program, which will be repeated on November 7 at 7:30 pm, is the first of three that feature Igor Levit in all six of Beethoven's concertos for the instrument. The series runs through November 17. Tickets are available [online](#).

During a recent Zoom call from Stockholm, Hadelich said that he's excited to return to Cleveland and to collaborate with his colleagues. "I have not worked with Julia Hagen, but I've heard her play and she is a wonderful cellist. I've known Igor for a very long time. I think we met in 2006 at the Marlboro Festival in Vermont."

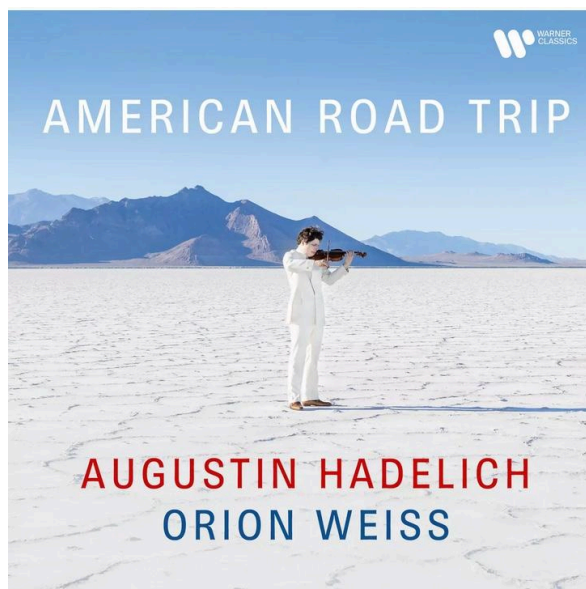
Hadelich said that Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* is an unusual piece because it's "kind of a piece of chamber music. It's a piano trio, but it's a piano trio concerto. It's not like any other piece in the repertoire."

The violinist noted that the story behind the piece is that Beethoven composed it for his student, the Archduke Rudolf of Austria, and his goal was to write an easier piano part and more difficult violin and cello parts.

Whether or not the story is completely true, Hadelich said the writing is typical of Beethoven. “His writing for string players is actually very pianistic. So things on the piano that lie very well in your fingers, on the violin can sometimes be quite uncomfortable. And in this concerto the violin and cello parts are full of those places.” Written in three movements and lasting roughly 37 minutes, the work is the only concerto the composer wrote for more than one solo instrument. It’s also the only concerto he wrote for cello.

Hadelich said the piece has an expansive first movement. “It also has a very beautiful, short slow movement that I think works quite well — it actually moves on at the right time into the last, which is really delightful,” adding that Beethoven was a master when it came to writing endings.

“There’s so many pieces that start off really great but towards the end, you feel like it’s kind of losing the plot or not quite hanging together. But when Beethoven has something like the last movement of the Triple Concerto, which is a Rondo, he eventually forgets about the Rondo form and writes a series of codas. It’s almost like he goes through his notebooks and gives you other ideas that he also had. There are these amazing moments in his pieces where the music sort of says goodbye, but doesn’t want to leave. Anyway, I enjoy the ending of this piece a lot. It’s fun and sometimes even kind of funny, and I think it works best when the performers have some fun together as well.”



Our conversation then turned to Hadelich and pianist Orion Weiss’ recent release, *American Road Trip* on Warner Classics. The recording features works by Charles Ives, Jascha Heifetz, Augustin Hadelich, John Adams, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Amy Beach, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, William Kroll, Manuel Ponce, Stephen Hartke, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Howdy Forrester, Eddie South, and Raimundo Penaforte.

I asked if he had the title in mind when they began recording the CD. “The title came a bit later. But when we started to brainstorm all the repertoire we liked that could go on it, we had

enough for at least two CDs.”

Hadlich said he and Weiss asked the label how long it could be and they were told maybe 81 or 82 minutes. “So we definitely had to cut some interesting pieces that we liked.”

It was important to Hadelich for the recording to include well-known works along with some wonderful obscure pieces that he wanted to record. “I also wanted to have some longer pieces. I think it’s important for a CD to have something more substantial, so it’s not just short pieces. So there were a lot of considerations that went into it.”

It was after they had chosen the recording repertoire that they began to think of a title.

“We went through a bunch of options, some of which were kind of cheesy. But it was Orion who first said ‘road trip,’ and I thought it would be the perfect title — it is kind of like a road trip going through all of these different styles. I think it’s something that is special about American classical music — it does feel like composers, even composers living at the same time as each other — come from different planets. It’s a bit like the whole country, where contrasting cultures coexist in the same place.”

The violinist said that this might be the most fun he’s ever had working on an album, mainly due to the fact that the music is so much fun to play. “Some of it is very hard, and some of the pieces were quite recent discoveries for me. In a way all of it is more recent, because when I came to the U.S. 20 years ago, I didn’t play any American music. Eventually I learned the Barber Concerto and started learning other American repertoire, but a lot of what is on this album hasn’t been in my repertoire for very long.”

He noted that he learned John Adams’ *Road Movies* in 2017 or 2018 and learned many of the shorter pieces during the pandemic. “And Stephen Hartke’s *Six Movements for Violin*, I learned in 2016 or 2017. So none of these are pieces I’ve played for 30 years. And Orion was wonderful to work with because he’s so familiar with the musical language of all the composers, and we had performed together a lot, so I knew it would be very easy to record with him.”

Hadelich stressed that having a good time is very important when making a recording. “There’s a lot of pressure to get things done and to play well. So it’s really helpful if you get along with the other person. The same is true when Orion and I tour. Sometimes you have to drive together for four hours or more, and I’ve found that it’s kind of essential that you enjoy spending time with someone aside from when you’re playing concerts. So yeah, Orion is one of my favorite people.”

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