

## Sibbi Bernhardssohn brings Mozart's "most perfect" violin concerto to CityMusic Cleveland

by Stephanie Manning



Enduringly popular ever since it was written in 1775, Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 3* is a staple in any violinist's catalog.

"It's a concerto that we all have to learn and teach," Sibbi Bernhardssohn said in a recent interview. "But this will actually be my first time performing it with an orchestra, so I'm really, really excited."

The violinist will join the CityMusic Cleveland Chamber Orchestra for a series of free performances beginning on December 12 at venues around the city. Conductor John McLaughlin Williams will lead the group in a program that also includes Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7* and Leó Weiner's *Serenade for Small Orchestra*. More information on locations and times is available [here](#).

Bernhardssohn, who serves on the faculty of the Oberlin Conservatory, has performed with CityMusic twice before, once as a member of the Pacifica Quartet and once as part of the group's chamber music series. But he's known about the ensemble for more than 20 years.

Bernhardssohn met founders Ronald and Eugenia Strauss while presenting workshops for adult amateur violinists at Interlochen. "I remember hearing them talk about their wonderful vision for CityMusic, presenting free concerts all over Cleveland," he said.

This program will be heard at Fairmount Presbyterian Church in Cleveland Heights (Dec. 12), St. Noel Catholic Church in Willoughby Hills (Dec. 13), the Shrine Church of St. Stanislaus in Cleveland's Slavic Village (Dec. 14), and Our Lady of Angels in Kamm's Corners (Dec. 15).

In preparing to play the Mozart concerto, Bernhardtsohn said he had to go back to basics. “When you’re actually performing it, you have to kind of rethink everything and just start from scratch, and not only go by what you’re used to hearing,” he said.

“I’m still amazed by how fresh and how beautiful it is. One of my friends was saying it’s probably the most perfect out of all the perfect violin concertos that Mozart wrote,” he said with a laugh. “And I thought that was a good way to describe it.”

Bernhardtsohn pointed to the composer’s ability to find freedom within Classical structures — and his clever orchestrations — as some of his favorite things about the work.

“Within the solo part, sometimes it’s like three or four people having this vivid conversation with each other,” he said. “Then when you add all the stuff that is going on in the orchestra, it becomes a very lively conversation with many, many different people.”

The violinist added that his recent preparation has given him a renewed appreciation of the challenges of playing Mozart beautifully. “You have to find a way to fit all these great characters within a smaller dynamic range in order to sound stylistic. Otherwise, things can get clumsy.”

Working through those challenges with him is conductor John McLaughlin Williams, who is coincidentally also a violinist himself. “Having played it, he clearly loves this concerto so much,” Bernhardtsohn said.

The timelessness of the music also makes it a good fit for City Music’s holiday program. “I think when you’re dealing with such a great piece like the Mozart, it fits in September, it fits in April. But it’s just so beautiful in the purest sense that it fits any occasion.”

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