

Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra: A conversation with Concerto Competition winner Grace Berendt



“When I was three years old my mom took me to a jazz concert. I saw the trombone, and I was immediately hooked,” Grace Berendt recalled. “From that day on, I knew I wanted to be a trombone player.”

On Sunday, May 10 at 3:00 pm at Severance Music Center, the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra Concerto Competition winner will step to the front of the Mandel Concert Hall stage to play Ferdinand David’s *Concertino for Trombone and Orchestra*.

Under the direction of James Feddeck the program also includes Aaron Copland’s *Letter from Home*, George Walker’s *Icarus in Orbit*, and Dvorak’s *Symphony No. 9* “From the New World.” Tickets are available [online](#).

I caught up with the Aurora High School senior by phone and began our conversation by congratulating her on the Concerto competition win.

Grace Berendt: Thank you so much.

Mike Telin: I’m curious about why you selected the David? To be honest, it’s the only piece by him that I know.

GB: It's definitely his best piece. It's actually one of the first trombone concertos I started learning, and I have to say that I have yet to find one that I like more. There's so much to love about it — the heroic melodies, as well as the emotions conveyed through it. I think there's really such a variety of styles and interpretations that can be taken with this piece. And it's just so much fun to play.

MT: How long have you been working on it?

GB: About three years.

MT: What are you looking forward to for the performance?

GB: I know how excited I'm going to feel — also how nervous I'll be. But I really want to channel my nerves into a feeling of excitement. And being proud of myself and the musicians around me for the work we've put into it to get to this point.

MT: Who do you study with?

GB: I actually study with two people. Eric Richmond — he's amazing — and has been my teacher since the seventh grade. I also started studying with Rick Stout who's in the Cleveland Orchestra — he's incredible.

MT: What are your plans post-high school?

GB: I'm planning to major in trombone performance as my goal is to become a professional orchestral musician. Right now I'm deciding where I'm going to college.

MT: How many years have you been in COYO?

GB: This is my fourth year.

MT: I remember hearing you play Firebird with Daniel Reith. You were fantastic, especially in the interrupting trombone slides.

GB: That was my favorite part.

MT: But it was so perfect.

GB: Thank you so much.

MT: What do you do when you're not playing the trombone?

GB: I'm usually playing my trombone. But I do really enjoy running — I did cross country and track for a few years in high school. I also like to do art projects, particularly sewing. I actually sewed my junior and senior homecoming dance dresses. They were both original designs — I'm pretty proud of them.

MT: That's wonderful. What attracted you to sewing and fashion design?

GB: My grandmother. She's always been into sewing, and she taught me how to do it when I was in preschool and I've just loved it ever since.

MT: Out of curiosity: Do you play any jazz?

GB: I did for a while. I was in the Jazz at The Music Settlement program. I've become more classically focused recently, but I'd love to get back into it.

MT: The trombone is a beautiful instrument: If somebody asks you to describe the sound, what do you tell them?

GB: It's like butter. It's rich, it's smooth, you just have to love it.

MT: Is there anything you'd like to add — any shout-outs to your COYO colleagues?

GB: I'd just like to thank everyone who has worked with me along the way to get me to this point because it really truly does take a village. And especially Mr. Feddeck, our new conductor this year. He's an incredible mentor and a really inspiring person to be around. I really connect with his way of teaching.

MT: On Sunday, will you also be playing the "New World" symphony?

GB: I will. I'm excited about that too. I think it's going to be fun.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 4, 2026

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)

