



# TITO MUÑOZ Lessons of Excellence

by Elaine Guregian

TITO MUÑOZ



**Age:** 26

**Born:** New York City

**Studied:** Began violin studies at the Juilliard School's Music Advancement Program; continued music studies at the Manhattan School of Music, Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, and Queens College City University of New York; alumnus of the National Conducting Institute and Aspen Music Festival and School

**Lives:** Cleveland Heights

**Position:** Assistant Conductor of The Cleveland Orchestra (third season of a three-season term)

**Away from the podium:** Enjoys traveling and keeping up with friends in cities around the globe

*An assistant conductor's job includes "covering" concerts — being prepared to step up and conduct if the regularly scheduled conductor is unexpectedly indisposed. The day after the Orchestra's final performance of the opera *Così fan tutte*, which Muñoz had prepared to conduct if necessary, he spoke about how he will prepare to lead the Orchestra in three concerts where he'll definitely be on the podium — on May 13, 14, and 15 — and how he balances the responsibilities of his varied job, interacting with audiences and musicians of all ages.*

**TITO MUÑOZ IS ALWAYS** looking for ways to make memorable connections. He found a great example in what Music Director Franz Welser-Möst did at a recent high school concert when he conducted Beethoven's Fifth. Welser-Möst began the performance by talking briefly about the Enlightenment, the historical period that so influenced Beethoven in composing his revolutionary work — and a topic that high

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school students study.

“They may not come back and say, ‘I remember Beethoven 5’ or whatever the piece may be, but they’ll remember it because of that experience, because there was a connection, something that gave them a hook,” Muñoz says.

“I think for students, it’s the whole experience of going to a concert that hooks them, even more than the music.”

Muñoz enjoys interacting with people, whether that means holding a Q & A session after a concert for young students or talking to conservatory-level musicians about orchestra life beyond the practice room. In three years at The Cleveland Orchestra, he has absorbed not only an understanding of how orchestras function as institutions but of how a major orchestra holds itself to the highest standards. And from Welser-Möst, he has observed how a leader can hold firm to his artistic integrity.

One might expect Muñoz to have picked up Welser-Möst’s conducting style for the Overture to *Die Fledermaus*, which the New York native will conduct in May. Viennese waltzes are a Welser-Möst trademark, after all.

“For various reasons, I haven’t had the opportunity to see Franz conduct much Viennese music,” Muñoz says. For him, the challenge and fun of conducting come from balancing his own ideas with Cleveland Orchestra tradition. Take, for example, Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, which Muñoz will conduct in the May concerts at Severance Hall.

“When it’s a repertory piece like the Berlioz that the musicians have played together many times, a conductor needs to

be persuasive,” he says. “I may have certain feelings about the piece that might not be what they’re used to. I’d better come in with good reasons for them, because you want to convince them that what you’re doing is sound and is something that you have thought about that makes good sense.”

Once the musicians are convinced, says Muñoz, “They’ll go with you 100 per cent.”

On the same concert, Muñoz is also excited to be leading a work by Osvaldo Golijov featuring clarinetist Frank Cohen, which the Orchestra hasn’t performed before. He expects that members of the Orchestra will arrive at the first rehearsal extraordinarily well prepared. Muñoz recalls that when a quintet from a certain famous European orchestra sat in on a Cleveland Orchestra rehearsal, “their jaws were open” in astonishment at the high level of readiness for a first rehearsal.

All these lessons about excellence in preparation, programming, and performance are things that Muñoz is taking with him as he takes the next career steps toward leading his own ensemble. He’ll be well prepared for his next step, after three years on the podium here.

#### **TICKETS**

*Tito Muñoz leads The Cleveland Orchestra May 13, 14, and 15 in concerts featuring works by Berlioz, Golijov, and Johann Strauss Jr. Tickets are available through the Severance Hall Ticket Office, online at [clevelandorchestra.com](http://clevelandorchestra.com), or by calling (216) 231-1111.*



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