

Cultural Daily

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Itzhak Perlman graces Disney Hall

R. Daniel Foster · Wednesday, January 17th, 2018

Itzhak Perlman is in vogue – a new documentary (Alison Chernick’s “Itzhak”) about the Israeli-born violinist, conductor and teacher premiered at the Hamptons International Film Festival last October. An original documentary was made in 1978. The festival featured the biography in its opening night splash; the film will be broadcast on PBS’ American Masters in 2018.

The superstar appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Walt Disney Concert Hall January 11-13, and will again grace the venue March 13 and 14.

The three January concerts led with Violin Concerto No. 1 in A minor by Bach, whose novel phrasings bathed the hall in a welcome feel-good vibe. Perlman, 72, was both soloist and conductor on the piece, which launched with vigor in its decisive opening passages, the theme ever-tightening while yet expanding throughout the movement via the musicians’ mastery.

Our guess was that Perlman played his Soil Stradivarius (1714), formerly owned by Yehudi Menuhin – created during the maker’s “golden period.” Perlman’s tones were indeed golden, stretched to a warm honey, never straying to hints of becoming cloyingly sweet. The musician, who lives in New York city with his wife, Toby (also a classically trained violinist), owns two other mid-1700s violins – as well as two Portuguese water dogs named Muttek and Boychick.

Good humor is a part of any Perlman concert – the musician is known for his sunny outlook and asides. The most notable one on January 11, said to a nearly full house: “For my next performance – we’ll actually play the music.” That, after ascending three steps to the conductor’s podium with considerable effort using crutches. Perlman contracted polio at age four, and uses an electric scooter to tool around.

Perlman took the podium (figuratively, as he sits when conducts) to conduct Brahms’ Variations on a Theme of Joseph Haydn. The piece was played commandingly; the finale’s resplendent theme soared. It’s always a curiosity to see the triangle appear – a downright frothy indulgence for Brahms, known for his sometimes frosty temperament.

Elgar’s Enigma Variations is a curiosity within itself, dedicated “to my friends pictured within,” wrote the composer. Each variation is a musical summation of individuals in the composer’s inner circle – musical cryptograms that include sketches of Elgar’s wife Alice, his publisher, and the composer himself.

Each variation’s distinct idea, or flavor, was brought to life by Perlman’s conducting, which

coaxed nuance from the orchestra. It's speculated that Perlman, in his early 70s, will not continue as a soloist for too much longer, although blemishes in his technique (not entirely unusual for later-age soloists) were not evident at the performance.

[Itzhak Perlman will hold a joint recital with pianist Martha Argerich](#) on March 13 and 14 at Disney Hall, as part of the [Colburn Celebrity Series](#). The pair will play Bach's Sonata for Keyboard and Violin, BWV 1017, and Franck's Violin Sonata in A.

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Top image courtesy of the Los Angeles Philharmonic

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