

Violist shines playing Bartok in orchestra debut

By Zachary Lewis
Plain Dealer Reporter
Bartok and Johann Strauss II, with violist Kim Kashkashian.

When: 8 p.m. today.

Where: Severance Hall, 11001 Euclid Ave., Cleveland.

Tickets: \$30-\$83. 216-231-1111.

It's tough to say who the real star is this weekend at Severance Hall.

As the composer of both major works on the program, Bela Bartok is a likely candidate. But so, too, is violist Kim Kashkashian, whose debut with the Cleveland Orchestra in a commanding, deeply poetic account of Bartok's Viola Concerto is alone worth the price of admission.

Call it a friendly draw.

By now, Bartok's Viola Concerto comes practically second nature to Kashkashian, a longtime champion of the piece and the author of a definitive recording. In her, Bartok's final work has been digested completely, and her mastery is apparent at every moment.

Timidity has no place under her bow. Phrases don't just end. They're punctuated cleanly. And whether the music is noble, tender or playful, Kashkashian relays it with pure, vibrant tone and red-blooded vigor, applying variable degrees of grit and luster as the occasion demands.

Rounding out this memorable performance are the orchestra and music director Franz Welser-Möst, who provide supple support and complement their guest's intensity with bold, brassy strength.