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LIFESTYLES

MAGAZINE



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CHARLIE SIEM

MAKING BEAUTIFUL MUSIC WITH STYLE &
SOPHISTICATION

By BAILEY BECKETT

PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE VILLA SAN MICHELE, FLORENCE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILLES-MARIE ZIMMERMAN

He's been photographed by Karl Lagerfeld. Appeared as the face of Dior. Serenaded Lady Gaga. Performed with The Who. Charlie Siem, the 34-year-old violinist, has changed classical music rules over the last decade, bringing youth, energy, and élan to the age-old genre. →





With dramatic strokes of his Guarneri del Gesù violin, an instrument that dates to the 1700s and insured for \$10 million, Siem's theatrical flourishes, impeccable style, and movie quality charisma has brought new, unexpected audiences around the world.

With his new album *Between the Clouds*, Siem is again bringing the past to the present with a selection of classics that include Kreisler, Sarasate, Paganini, Elgar, and Wieniawski. It was recorded in a salon-style form evocative of Parisian nights, complemented by pianist Itamar Golan. "It's a collection of virtuoso pieces that Itamar and myself have played together in concert over the last few years," says Siem. "It's a very personal selection from the core repertoire that was a joy to record." *Vanity Fair* summed it up perfectly: "When Charlie Siem gets the tiger under the chin, it purrs."

New York Lifestyles caught up with the virtuoso where he has spent the pandemic.

// *I've always played the violin—I picked up on it when I was three, and I've never looked back.* //



What's the inspiration behind *Between the Clouds*?
It's a collection of some of my favorite lollipop pieces for violin and piano. It features a curated selection of encore tracks—firework pieces that you put in a recital program after the sonata. We put this thing together in terms of the edits and getting the album finalized during the lockdown, and I felt between the clouds. I didn't know necessarily where I was going, in a philosophical sense.

Did you always want to become a violinist?
I've always played the violin—I picked up on it when I was three, and I've never looked back. It was my mother who introduced me to the instrument. She used to play tapes of music, and I really fell in love with it. The repertoire for the violin is extraordinary; there's so much variety. Some great pieces I used to listen to as a child are inspirational, and they really stimulated my imagination. Deep inside, I had a calling. I had to be very disciplined. I was in school, so I would get up at about 5:30 in the morning and do about two hours before school. Then I practiced on my lunch break for an hour. And then I practiced for three hours when I came home.

How did you develop your elegant performance style?
I relate something of myself within the music's meaning. You play and interpret a piece of music that has thousands of notes, make them all fit together, fill phrases and, as it were, lift the architecture of the music into the air so that it creates something coherent and relatable to an audience. →

What are some of your fondest musical memories?

When I was 11, I played in Tel Aviv—the Vivaldi concerto for four violins with Ida Haendel, one of the great violinists of all time, whom I studied with, and Shlomo Mintz, who is also my teacher. That was a great memory for me. Also, when I first played with the Oslo Philharmonic (I'm half Norwegian). I also remember playing with the Royal Philharmonic in Kenwood House, which is this big open-air venue in London, when I was 17. When I wrote my own piece, one or two years ago, and recorded this with the English Chamber Orchestra, that was a special moment for me because I've never written a piece before.

How does being so well-traveled affect your music?

Playing the violin is a very technical thing, and traveling is distracting because the best way to be good at the violin is to stay in one place and practice. But traveling is a great privilege, and I enjoy it as much as I can. I don't know if that affects the way you play, but I think it affects how you enjoy music and what you get out of music. Your breadth of understanding is expanded when you travel because you see various cultures meet hugely different people, which opens you up. It makes you more aware of the differences in the world. And this allows you to be more generous in the way you express yourself in the music.



*“With his new album *Between the Clouds*, Siem is again bringing the past to the present with a selection of classics...”*



You've performed in New York many times. What's your favorite part of the city?

New York has always represented a cultural center, and I am charged with its energy each time I visit. Whether it's Broadway, the Met, Carnegie Hall, or Lincoln Center, I am overwhelmed by the richness in that great city.

You have also become a style ambassador for designers like Karl Lagerfeld. When did this develop?

By chance. I was playing a concert, and I was asked the next day to be in the Dunhill campaign. I thought this was a great way to get exposure as a violinist, so I said yes. That's how it started. I've done a few things in the fashion world, and I continue to do things with those guys because I can meet many interesting people, and it doesn't take much time. And I get paid very well! If you're lucky to work with great photographers, they make everything happen. It's different than music, but the same principles apply. It's a challenge whenever you go on the stage to do the best you can and be at your highest level.

Why do you think the fashion world has taken such a liking to you?

I've got my personal style, and I feel strong about who I am. I don't think of myself as a fashionable person. I don't follow the fashion of today. I do something unusual for the fashion world to use—they don't have many violinists. It's an unusual but kind of glamorous connection.

What is your style secret?

The key to me is wearing clothes that fit you in a very complimentary way and are tailored to your body shape. Also, not to wear flamboyant clothes. You don't want people to notice the clothes and not the person. I wouldn't say I like too many colors. I keep it simple.

For more information on Charlie Siem, visit charliesiem.com.