Yo-Yo Ma & the GSO: in tune for a rematch

Superstar cellist says he's eager for return visit

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Cellist superstar Yo-Yo Ma says he can't wait to get back to Greenville, because he so enjoyed his visit here in 2004. Then, a sold-out house at the Peace Center heard Ma solo Antonin Dvorak's richly inventive Second Cello Concerto with the Greenville Symphony Orchestra, led by Maestro Edvard Tchivzhel.

"I love the orchestra and the conductor. Edvard and the musicians are a great match," he says. "I remember from the last time how good the orchestra was, and the story of how the orchestra attracts musicians from the three neighboring states because they so love to play with the GSO."

The incomparable artist will return to the Peace Concert Hall on Wednesday to solo in a double feature: German composers Ernest Bloch's "Schelomo," Hebraic Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra, and Robert Schumann's Cello Concerto in A minor. The concert sold out months in advance.

Ma says he likes the program Tchivzhel built.

It opens with British composer Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance," which Ma describes as "a very societal piece, dedicated to a close friend of Elgar's."

Ma says "Schelomo" is essentially a description of the biblical King Solomon, a person whose

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YOU CAN GO

What: Yo-Yo Ma with the Greenville Symphony Orchestra
When: 7:30 p.m. May 6
Where: Peace Concert Hall
Tickets: Sold out
Information: 467-3000

Yo-Yo Ma performs with the Greenville Symphony Orchestra on Wednesday. (AP)

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actions have great weight and consequences.

"How do you deal with the decisions you made, be it the right ones or the wrong ones?" Ma says. "It is epic. The musical piece looks at how someone like a king uses his power."

The piece's relevance is timeless, he says.

"Here we are in the present day with two wars going on, and decisions have to be made, yet we can't predict the future to estimate, was the decision made good or bad?

"Either way, there can be horrible consequences," Ma says. "This piece tries to delve into the mind of a decision-maker and, in reality, moves us from biblical times to the present day."

How does the soloist who presents the work serve as the composer's translator?

"I try to be the advocate for the thoughts the composition represents," Ma says.

Schumann's work takes the listener in a different direction, into a daydreamer's reverie of sentimental thoughts, Ma says. "It carries you into a different world, a different place. I try to be in that flighty, playful niche Schumann has created, and be in that character the music seems to express," he says.

The effervescent Ma also talked about some personal moments he had at the presidential inauguration, where he performed in a quartet with violinist Itzhak Perlman, clarinetist Anthony McGill and pianist Gabriela Montero.

Ma says the sea of people he saw from the platform "was breathtaking." But just as memorable was glimpsing a 10-inch-high box, which Ma thought contained a Bible but turned out to be Sasha Obama's step-up perch so she could see her daddy better. Ma, the father of a daughter and a son, says "it was just too cute."

Asked about his current focus, the globe-trotting artist says that in addition to his many engagements he's concentrating on the Silk Road Project he established in 1998. The project promotes the study of the cultural and artistic traditions along the ancient Silk Road trade route that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean.

"One of the ways we can explore the world in the terms of expressive art is to explore the various traditions of the world, including our own, and get people emotionally involved with one another."

