

## **Preview: Leonidas Kavakos, Prom 55: Royal Albert Hall, London**

### **Forward to the 19th century**

**By Jessica Duchon**

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The Greek violinist Leonidas Kavakos, performing Berg's Violin Concerto at the Proms, has enjoyed not the meteoric rise of today's teenaged musicians, but a steady progression in international acclaim. With his background steeped in Greek culture and an incisive intellect that can analyse and enthuse in equal measure, this mustachioed virtuoso meets none of the conventional violinistic stereotypes, but often seems to surpass them.

Kavakos, 40 this year, won important competitions as a youngster, but at 21 decided to rethink his bowing technique. It is a little like watching a 19th-century violinist. His bow arm, instead of being lifted high and pressing down, hangs relatively naturally from the shoulder. "The production of sound on the violin is very unnatural," Kavakos explains, "and modern bowing techniques can give the tone an overloud, aggressive edge. The sound needn't be loud; it just needs to carry."

His other extraordinary influence is that his father and grandfather played in a Greek folk band. "If you grow up with this sound and you see the mentality - they play for fun, improvising, challenging each other - you start thinking about how to apply it to classical music," Kavakos says. "For folk musicians, spontaneity is the only important factor - but they always apply it within their tradition. So one can be spontaneous, original, innovative, but with a certain integrity. Without limits, nothing exists!"

In October, he's playing the Dvorak Violin Concerto with the London Symphony Orchestra - part of a busy season taking him to the world's top orchestras and concert halls, and returning him to the Camerata Salzburg, of which he is principal guest conductor. If these are limits, they're the finest there are.

Leonidas Kavakos plays Berg's Violin Concerto with the BBC SO at the Prom on 25 August (020-7589 8212)