



BOW OUT David Coucheron in the last row at Atlanta Symphony Hall

Lord of the Strings

From his first chair, David Coucheron captivates Atlanta Symphony Orchestra fans.

| By Jennifer Bradley Franklin | Photography by Sarah Dorio |

David Coucheron has a look that would turn heads in any setting (and did, during our interview in a bustling Midtown coffee shop). But dressed in a tuxedo, with a 1725 Stradivarius violin perched masterfully on his shoulder, creating eerily beautiful music for the 1,762 patrons of Atlanta's Symphony Hall, he is downright mesmerizing.

At 27, Coucheron is the youngest concertmaster (basically, leader of the first chair violins, and thus, second in command, after the conductor) of any major symphony in the United States. Age aside, he gives off the air of an old soul, referencing historical geniuses of music with such admiration and familiarity that they sound like old friends. Perhaps they are: He picked up his first violin at 3 years old, in his hometown of Oslo, Norway. His mother, an accomplished pianist, wanted someone to play with and encouraged Coucheron to learn the violin. Even though music was in his family, he points out, "I kept playing because I liked it, not necessarily because I was better at it than anyone else."

After earning his Master of Music from Juilliard, he landed the plum role in Atlanta in 2010. He says he was drawn south because of the symphony and its world-renowned, long-time conductor, Robert Spano. "It's a joy to work with him. Spano is such an inspiring conductor. I look forward to every time he's here."

Because of his role, Coucheron is in a position of leadership over musicians who have been playing their instruments longer than he has been drawing breath. He takes the role seriously, studying, marking music and practicing for more than 40 hours per week. "I have a fortunate situation where the section is nice to me and I'm respectful of them," he says. "Every week we create something new. I love being a part of that, helping to guide that process."

As if being handsome and talented weren't enough, Coucheron exudes a genuine humility and love for his work. He says, "I think if I can get people to enjoy the music as much as I do, I've done my job." Anyone who has seen him perform would agree that it's a job well done. **▣**