



1 Siem says he first heard the piece in the car with his mother at age three and told her he wanted to play it.

2 The bespoke tailor began its operation on Savile Row in London but moved to Sackville Street after its original home was destroyed during World War II. First granted a royal warrant in 1820, it still holds one. Its tailors have dressed kings, aristocrats and famous dandy Beau Brummell.

The Answers

with...

CHARLIE SIEM

Virtuoso Charlie Siem, 33, has become almost as well known for his personal style as for his talent with a violin. He's made international best-dressed lists, has performed with the world's top orchestras and the Who, has played for Lady Gaga and Katy Perry and, at 26, became one of the youngest professors in the UK at Leeds College of Music. Almost constantly on the road, the native Brit—and his rare 1735 Guarneri del Gesù violin—will appear onstage in Beirut for the first time this year to perform at the Al Bustan Festival. One of his career highlights was playing at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, which, he says, “felt like I’d arrived and I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing.” *JANICE O’LEARY*

What have you done recently for the first time?

I played the Beethoven Violin Concerto in D Major last year in Turkey. I waited for 30 years to play that concerto. My goal was never to be a violinist. I just wanted to play that piece.¹ It was a special moment.

What, apart from more time, would make the biggest difference to your life?

The patience to stay in one place for more than two or three days. My lifestyle is quite peripatetic. I’m on the move even if I’m not playing.

First thing you do in the morning?

Drink a half liter of water in one go.

What advice do you wish you’d followed?

I don’t really care what other people think. I just focus on my own experience. I’m on the stage, so naturally I have to think about how I’m perceived a little bit. But it’s not good to dwell on it.

What do you do that’s still analog?

Play the violin! Most things, actually. Driving cars, exercising, being outside. I like living in a physical way.

What in your wardrobe do you wear most often?

My concert suits. I also dress up and put on a suit for dinner. So those get worn often, too. I’ve used Meyer & Mortimer² in London since I was 18. For my concert suits I have a pleat added in the back so I can move easily and a pocket made for my cigar case.

What do you most crave at the end of the day?

Always a cocktail. Which is why I don’t do it every day. It can become a bad habit. But I do like to sit down for a gin martini.

How do you find calm?

Routine and discipline. I need the boundaries in order to let go and be set free. If I’m stressed and distracted, I’m not creative.

Who is your guru?

I don’t know that I’ve had one. For me, it’s kind of internal. My journey and my mistakes shape and push me.

What apps do you use the most?

Spotify, Netflix, Instagram and WhatsApp. I’m in constant contact with family on a group chat and with my manager. ▶



Cartier Tank watch



Lamborghini Huracán



Gritti Palace hotel, Venice



⁴ Giuseppe Cipriani set up the small inn and gardens with a restaurant on the island in the middle of the Venetian Lagoon in 1935. It's still owned and run by the Cipriani family and was a favorite of Ernest Hemingway and Charlie Chaplin.

What song is currently in your head?

Barry White. I'm a big fan. He's soulful.

Who is your dealer, and what do they source for you?

I have two, in London. They show me great violins that come through their shops. Florian Leonhard, a German guy, and J. & A. Beare. Through Beare, I had a copy of my violin made by Peter Beare, and I love it. He makes beautiful violins that are a pleasure to play.

What is your exercise routine, and how often do you do it?

I exercise about three times per week. Strength training on big muscle groups. Posturally, playing the violin can be taxing. Exercising my back can give me longevity as a player, plus I enjoy the endorphin release.

Are you wearing a watch? How many do you own?

Not currently. I own a Cartier Tank³ that I was given on my 21st birthday. I wear jewelry instead. Bracelets, a necklace and a ring.

What does success look like?

It's when I feel I'm living up to who I think I should be. Playing on a level that's the very best that I can under the pressure of a top concert hall. And when I'm able to come outside myself and give something to friends and family, I always feel better.

If you could learn a new skill, what would it be?

I would love to be able to sit down and play piano brilliantly.

How much do you trust your gut instinct?

A lot. I think I know what's right early on with most things. But my nature is to second-guess it.

Drive or be driven?

I like driving, though it depends on the car. I like cars, their power and speed. I have a Lamborghini Huracán: It's the most thrilling thing, but not all that comfortable on a three-and-a-half-hour drive to Florence from Monaco, which is my home base.

Where are your regular tables?

In Florence, where I sometimes live, I like Harry's Bar and Trattoria Cammillo. In Venice, I like Do Forni for seafood. Also Locanda Cipriani on Torcello.⁴ I'm a big restaurant person. I tend to eat in them multiple times a day, and I always order the same food in each restaurant.

When was the last time you completely unplugged?

Just now. I went to Venice for two days with my sister and totally relaxed and watched the night change and ate my favorite food.

What's your favorite hotel?

The Gritti Palace in Venice. It's the hotel I stay in most often, so it's the most comfortable to come back to. They know me quite well now. The last time I went they told me I'm the most regular guest they have. I always go with my youngest sister. It holds a special place in our hearts.

What's always in your hand luggage?

I only ever have hand luggage, so it always has everything. A book to read, a charger, minimal clothes, my concert uniform and tracksuits.

Wine of choice?

Italian wine. I like Chianti, and Antinori wines.⁵ But I tend to drink Burgundy in restaurants.

What's your most treasured possession?

My violin. It's almost 300 years old and worth \$15 million.

Bowie or Dylan?

Bowie. 🎸

³ Louis Cartier created the brand's iconic watch in 1917, inspired by the Renault FT-17 tanks introduced during World War I.

⁵ The Antinori family has been making wine in Tuscany since 1385; the company is now run by three Antinori sisters and is lauded for its Sangiovese.