

Review**Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom with
Nicholas McGegan and Joshua Smith (July 20)**

by Robert Rollin



Despite muggy weather, many Northeast Ohio music enthusiasts turned out for last Saturday evening's Cleveland Orchestra Classical Era concert directed by British conductor Nicholas McGegan. McGegan has directed San Francisco's Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra for over 27 years, and made over 100 recordings of Handel, Vivaldi and other Baroque composers. He is also a flutist and harpsichordist. McGegan's musical energy and imagination are infectious. He conducted enthusiastically without a baton and constantly molded musical flow with his gestures.

Notwithstanding the presence of the Mozart *Flute Concerto*, the evening's highlight was Haydn's *Symphony No. 103, The Drum Roll*. Like the later Beethoven *Seventh*, this is a truly great symphony that charms listener with its melodic beauty, invention, and humor. The first movement, *Adagio – Allegro con spirito*, justifies the symphony's subtitle by opening with a powerful rolled timpani solo that surprisingly reappears near the final section. Otherwise it is a conventional first movement, serving up a slow introduction followed by two highly animated themes in rapid six-eight meter.

The delightful performance included an entrancing oboe solo, lovely phrasing, and exhilarating soloistic fragments exchanged among flute, oboe, clarinet, and upper strings. The timpani solo's return heralded an *Adagio* theme mini-development and subsequent fragments of the two *Allegro* theme groups. The bassoons added an especially lovely color to the ensemble, and seemed to hint at the medieval *Dies Irae* theme.

The second movement, *Andante*, is a series of variations on two themes, the first, major and the second, minor. The two themes, though different from one another, are united in an ascending melodic profile followed by an immediate descent. The concertmaster had a beautiful filigreed variation that McGegan balanced masterfully with the accompaniment. Again the bassoons were entrancing, and there was an inventive exchange between the clarinet and the cello section.

The good humored and rhythmically inventive Minuet had fine playing by horns and woodwinds. The *Finale, Allegro con spirito*, is monothematic, but keeps changing in a developmental kaleidoscope. The performance was stunning because of its varied dynamics kept in fine balance by McGegan.

Domenico Cimarosa's *The Secret Marriage* was among the most popular of his 76 operas. This Neapolitan composer specialized in hugely successful comic operas. The Overture is a short gem for large orchestra that featured lots of timpani, an imaginative chromatic second theme, and wonderful playing by violins, horns, and oboe. There was a grace-noted moment in the oboe that sounded like a bird chirping, and a delightfully surprising, sudden complete silence prior to the final rush to conclusion.

The Orchestra also presented two charming Mozart works. The *Symphony No. 33 in B-flat major*, K. 319, is dated, Salzburg, 1789. Prior to moving to Vienna, Mozart's symphonies were in three movements. In the next decade he added a Minuet and Trio movement to make *Symphony No. 33* palatable to Viennese audiences. This movement featured nice use of paired horns and a lively oboe solo. The first movement, *Allegro assai*, had rhythmically interesting syncopated accompaniments and rapid triplet figures. The restrained *Andante* possessed quiet nocturnal charm, and the *Finale, Allegro assai*, an imaginative development that explored minor keys.



The featured soloist for the evening was Joshua Smith, the orchestra's principal flute, who appeared in the Mozart *Flute Concerto in G Major*, K. 313. The reduced orchestra seemed unsuitable for outdoor performance, as the ensemble sound rose to the rafters, rather than fully reaching the audience. Sometimes Smith's low register was too soft to be heard. Nonetheless, his agile high register playing brightened the *Allegro maestoso* first movement and its cadenza. The lyrical *Adagio non troppo* was light and graceful. After the second theme in minor, the cadenza ended with some exquisite melodic gestures and attractive trills. The *Rondo* provided a more brilliant minuet featuring the solo flute in delicately intricate passagework.

Published on clevelandclassical.com July 23, 2013