

Review

**Cleveland Orchestra with Jahja Ling
and Ray Chen at Blossom (August 11)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Sometimes everything works together for the good. On Sunday evening, perfect weather, a gifted young soloist, an engaging program and an energized conductor all conspired to create a memorable evening at Blossom. The soloist was violinist Ray Chen, his vehicle was Vivaldi's popular quartet of concertos, *The Seasons* (teamed up with Rossini's irresistible *La gazza ladra* overture and Mendelssohn's scenic *Scottish* symphony), and the podium was commanded by an old Blossom friend, the estimable Jahja Ling. A large crowd assembled on the lawn and the pavilion was two-thirds full.

Though Chen, who is Australian, playfully suggested beforehand that he might start with Winter and play *The Seasons* in Down Under order, he began with Spring, as is customary, immediately creating synergy with concertmaster Jung-Min Amy Lee and principal second violinist Stephen Rose in a delightful series of bird calls. Throughout the four concertos, Chen changed his tone and color to vividly paint the scenes described in the accompanying sonnets, played both with attention to detail and brilliant athleticism (shedding quite a few bow hairs in the process) and made a few thousand instant fans in the adoring crowd.

While Ray Chen was playing a Strad that was already 23 years old when Vivaldi published *The Seasons*, no attempt was made to be HIP (create an historically informed performance). But Ling and The Cleveland Orchestra's large string section were super-sensitive to balances and nuances; in one lovely moment in the middle of Autumn, the strings were so hushed you could hear Joela Jones's stylish harpsichord lines.

(Those who missed hearing Chen this time will be happy to hear that he's booked on the Performing Arts Series at the Cleveland Museum of Art on February 12, 2014, when he'll play a recital with pianist Julio Elizade.)

The evening began with a drum roll announcing Rossini's overture to *The Thieving Magpie*, a wonderful curtain-raiser the composer admitted to having written in a top-floor room at La Scala on the very day of the opera's premiere, nattered by copyists who seized every page as soon as it was written. If that's true, the overture doesn't seem hastily conceived. The Orchestra played it with charm, operatic verve and tight ensemble.

At the other end of the evening, Mendelssohn's third symphony began with a wonderful spell of wind playing that set the tone for a rich musical memoir of Mendelssohn's tramps through Scotland. That the weather was kind to reeds for a change was clear from Franklin Cohen's delicious solo in the second movement and from equally fine chattering from the wind section later on. A lyrical *Adagio cantabile* and a rich-toned, chorale-like finale showed off Mendelssohn's skill at orchestration and drew on The Cleveland Orchestra's deep reservoir of sonority. Conducting without a score and with obvious affection for the piece, Jahja Ling joined its four continuous movements into an evocative and engaging narrative.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com August 13, 2013