

Review: Mendelssohn, Adams Violin Concertos- Chad Hoopes, MDR Leipzig Radio Orchestra with Kristjan Järvi

By Daniel Hautzinger



Nineteen-year old violinist Chad Hoopes is certainly not the first young violinist to play the Mendelssohn concerto. (Hoopes himself first performed it with a professional orchestra when he was nine). As Donald Rosenberg notes in his well-researched liner notes for Hoopes's new recording of the concerto, it was written for Ferdinand David, who began his career as a prodigy, and it was later taken up by the great 19th century virtuoso Joseph Joachim at the age of fourteen. Now, nearly every violinist, prodigy or not, has played it at some point in his or her career.

The Mendelssohn is thus a predictable choice for inclusion on Hoopes's debut album, on the Naïve label. The other piece on the recording, however, is a surprise: John Adams's 1993 violin concerto, written a century and a half after Mendelssohn's. And Hoopes's adventurous programming pays off. His performance of the Adams is multi-hued, enchanting, and technically brilliant.

The Adams presents many difficulties beyond virtuosic passagework. The soloist plays almost constantly, with breaks few and far between. Rhythms shift in and out of sync with the orchestra, and the violinist has to sustain long lines over extended periods of time above a boiling, bubbling accompaniment. But the rewards are great when a soloist overcomes these hurdles, as Hoopes does: the piece is fascinating and masterfully constructed.

Hoopes imbues the lyrical lines of the first movement with a wide variety of tone colors, while the MDR Leipzig Radio Orchestra, conducted by Kristjan Järvi, cycles through endlessly rising scales. The movement is essentially fourteen minutes of roving violin phrases over repeating textures in the orchestra, yet Adams, with the help of both Hoopes and the Leipzig Orchestra, has managed to sustain both a sense of direction and interest. (Adams accomplishes a similar feat in his concerto for electric violin, *The Dharma at Big Sur*). The texture slowly becomes more agitated, then pauses for a questing cadenza, engrossingly rendered by Hoopes.

The heart of the work is the exquisite second movement. Entitled “Body Through Which the Dream Flows,” it is a chaconne, built off a repeating bass line. Though Hoopes delicately shades his searching, rootless phrases, it is Järvi and the orchestra who enhance the movement’s beauty. They maintain a fragile balance between quiet compassion, grounded in the reassuring bass line, and creeping darkness, manifested in the chords that spread like spidery cracks in the strings, low winds, and muted horns. There is an affecting non-build throughout the movement: the music always seems to be inching towards solace, but never shakes free of its ominous shadows.

The final movement, “Toccare,” is a virtuoso flight through rambunctious dance tunes that come close to hoedown fiddling at points. Hoopes plays them with energy and admirable speed.

Hoopes’s performance of the Adams is inspired, his Mendelssohn is disappointing. He uses hyper-romantic vibrato, and slightly delays every high note he can, lingering on it with a changed tone color. His playing is technically flawless, especially in the fleet third movement. But even in that delightful scherzo his intense vibrato robs the music of its effervescence. The orchestra plays fervidly in the first movement and displays a sensitivity to phrasing in the lovely second movement that Hoopes might have imitated. But Hoopes is young and the Mendelssohn has had many storied interpreters who are nigh impossible to top. On the evidence of his performance of the Adams, he has a bright career ahead of him.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 10, 2014.

Click here for a printable copy of this article.

[Return to the Web site.](#)