

### Cleveland Orchestra: Beethoven & Hindemith with guest conductor Marek Janowski (December 4)

by Daniel Hathaway



One size didn't fit all the pieces on last Thursday evening's program at Severance Hall. Guest conductor Marek Janowski ordered up a small Cleveland Orchestra for Beethoven's Haydn-esque first symphony, brought on a very large Cleveland Orchestra for Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber*, then sent most of those players home, leaving a medium-sized Cleveland Orchestra to end the evening with Beethoven's second symphony.

If that seemed an odd way to construct a program, it was. Perhaps the idea was to show the marked differences between Beethoven's first two forays into the symphony (written a little over two years apart between 1799 and 1802). Then it would have made sense to play the two in sequence and save the wonderful brashness of the Hindemith for a closer. The stage crew might have found that to be a good plan for extra-musical reasons, but ending with Beethoven No. 2 guaranteed an anti-climax.

With the use of a small string section for Beethoven No. 1, the winds gained extra prominence, forming a perfectly-blended *Harmonie* from the first, still-surprising chords of the slow introduction. Janowski pointed up some frequently ignored accents in the Andante, and reined in the Scherzo (masquerading as a minuet in Beethoven's score). The finale began playfully, turning festive at the tempo change and covering a wide range of terraced dynamics.

Janowski moved the proceedings right along, hardly pausing between movements, a propensity which turned from efficiency into breathlessness as the concert continued. Thus the Hindemith sounded more driven than spacious, with little time to luxuriate in

the wonderful wind and brass sonorities that make the *Metamorphosis* resemble a work for concert band with incidental string parts attached.

Often a riot of sound, the piece boasts colorful wind doublings and plays blocks of the orchestra off against one another, especially in the jazzy fugue that begins in the brass section, then serially infects the winds, percussion and strings.

The piece culminated in a crazed and brilliant march that revealed the full power and intensity of The Cleveland Orchestra's tonal palette. Flutist Joshua Smith was the commanding soloist in the Andantino, earning a solo bow. Contrabassoonist Jonathan Sherwin added importantly to the lower end of that spectrum, and the percussion section's contributions were priceless.

Beethoven's second symphony is full of the composer's signature surprises — more mischievous now as he finds his own identity and is less beholden to Haydn's special brand of wittiness — but it never quite serves up the allure of opus 21 or the drama of the later six symphonies. Cushioned by a slightly larger string section, the winds now had a busy but less forward role in the ensemble sound.

Conducting without score, as he had done all evening, Janowski again seemed fixated on forward motion. The exception was the Scherzo, which was carefully controlled, but segued immediately into a finale that was more *Presto* than *Allegro molto*, more whipped up than animated from within. Urged on from the podium, The Cleveland Orchestra can obligingly play cleanly at nearly any tempo, but sometimes that happens at the expense of the music.

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