

Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra: China tour send-off concert (June 14)

by Mike Telin



On Monday morning June 15, the seventy-seven member Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra gathered at Cleveland Hopkins Airport to embark on its second international tour, traveling to China for concerts in Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall (June 18), Tianjin's Grand Theater (June 19), Shanghai's Oriental Arts Center (June 21), and Ningbo's Cultural Plaza Theatre (June 22). On Sunday, June 14 at Severance Hall, a large and

enthusiastic audience was treated to a thrilling send-off concert when music director Brett Mitchell led his talented young musicians in works by Shostakovich, Kilar, Barber, and Tchaikovsky.

The program opened with an exuberant performance of Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*. Following the grand brass fanfare, Mitchell set a fast tempo for the wind section's opening melodic lines, which they played with aplomb. Throughout, the orchestra produced a clear, lush sound.

Written in 1988, Polish composer Wojciech Kilar's *Orawa* for strings is an engaging, quasi minimalist work that evokes the cyclical power of nature and human life. Lasting just under ten minutes, *Orawa*'s arching rhythmic structure continually shifts between the reticent and the jubilant. Mitchell led COYO's string section in an inspired performance and they sounded splendid. Bravo to cellist Henry Shapard for his top-notch solo work.

Originally written as a ballet score for Martha Graham, Samuel Barber would later revise his score into the two-section concert work, *Medea's Dance of Vengeance*. Scored for large orchestra, the piece opens with a quiet section, but it quickly moves into a frenetic mood, capturing Medea's final rage and the destruction of her family. Barber gives the

wind section ample opportunity to shine, and shine they did. Mitchell kept the tempos in check without losing any of the work's wonderfully hysterical qualities.

Following intermission, Mitchell and his brass section held back nothing as they launched into Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4*. As this ensemble has proven in the past, it is one that many cities would be happy to have as their professional orchestra. Mitchell again led a technically clean and musically thoughtful performance. The pizzicatos during the third movement "Scherzo" had spirit, and the rousing "Finale" brought the symphony to a fine conclusion. Kudos to Elise Campbell (flute), Joseph Tolonen (oboe), Seth Blankenship (clarinet), Aviva Klein (bassoon), and Zoe Resmer (horn), for their excellent solo work.

After acknowledging the audience ovation, COYO gave a fitting good-bye with an encore — a Tan Dun arrangements of a traditional Chinese folksong.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 18, 2015.

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