

Cleveland Orchestra with Antonio Pappano and Marie-Nicole Lemieux (April 30)

by Daniel Hathaway



Love comes in infinite varieties, and three of them were represented on The Cleveland Orchestra's program on Saturday, April 30. The program began with Richard Wagner's "Prelude and Love-Death" from *Tristan and Isolde* (the romantic-tragic kind of love), continued with Ernest Chausson's *Poem of Love and the Sea* (the poetic-tragic flavor), and ended with Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* (the narcissistic sort).

Batonless and expressive on the podium, guest conductor Antonio

Pappano conjured up a warm, intensely blended sound from the glorious cello section at the beginning of the Wagner, crafting a long, well-structured crescendo and generally holding the music in an ardent embrace. This worked well most of the time, though less-than-precise cues resulted in some less-than-precise entrances.

Switching seamlessly from the Teutonic to the Gallic, The Cleveland Orchestra provided lighter textures and a tonal palette that favored pastels for the Chausson poems.

Quebecois soloist Marie-Nicole Lemieux (listed on the program page as a mezzo-soprano but as a contralto in her bio) was a fabulous choice for this assignment. Her sumptuous tone and even timbre glowed through her every note, and projected powerfully into the house.

The lovely interlude featured solos by bassoonist Jonathan Sherwin and principal cellist Mark Kosower. Pentatonic scales introduced the second poem, accompanied by dark woodwind hues. The piece ended in a sequence of tragic sonorities.



After intermission, Pappano leapt to the podium and set *Ein Heldenleben* in motion before the applause stopped. This autobiographical tone poem probably finds Strauss at his apogee of self-adulation, but his orchestrational genius allowed The Cleveland Orchestra the opportunity to sound its virtuosic best. The horn-studded opening (nine horns onstage!) was fabulous, the sonic din so great that the eventual grand silence was as compelling as an explosion.

The winds were brilliant in their representation of nattering music critics, the offstage trumpets made a fine effect, and volleys of snare drums and brass energized Strauss's personal story — as well as inspiring orchestra members to check their earplugs.

Violin solos by William Preucil, an English horn *pastorella* played by Robert Walters, and horn solos by an anonymous visitor distinguished later portions of the piece, and quotations from *Don Juan*, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and other Straussian tunes popped up from time to time. The piece ends with only the wind band, a striking sonority that provided a satisfying contrast to what had gone before. Pappano and the Orchestra gave Strauss their all this evening.

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