

Earth and Air: String Orchestra with cellist Deborah Pae (Apr. 6)

by Daniel Hathaway



Michigan-based cellist Deborah Pae was the featured soloist with David Ellis' *Earth and Air: String Orchestra* at a concert in the nave of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights on Friday evening, April 6. The main piece of business that brought her to Cleveland was a performance of Jeffrey Mumford's *two rhapsodies for cello and strings*, but she was front and center in Tchaikovsky's *Andante Cantabile* as well.

Composed in 2010 (for cello alone) and revised in 2013 (with string orchestra added), Mumford's pair of pieces cast the soloist in bold relief against the ensemble of 13 players. In the slow-moving first rhapsody, Pae made searing drama out of Mumford's dramatic solo lines, punctuated by pizzicatos and answered by snap pizzicati from the double bass. After a caesura, the slow progress resumes, leading into a cadenza. The soloist is soon rejoined by the strings who surge toward another cadenza. The cello's role in the second rhapsody is more melodic, contrasting with unsettled textures in the orchestra. After another caesura, the piece ends on a note high in the soloist's range.

A bit of context in the form of composer's or program notes would have been helpful in navigating the rhapsodies. Full bios of Pae and Mumford and a long paragraph about Ellis appeared in the printed program, but alas, not a peep about any of the music.

Tchaikovsky's arrangement of a movement from his D-Major String Quartet gave Deborah Pae a different type of solo assignment. Here, she had the opportunity to show off her handsome tone and perfectly-centered pitch in a noble, almost Elgarian

Andante cantabile. Among other delights, her lyrical treatment of a sequence of repeated notes was magical.

Pae's pieces were introduced and followed by movements from Victor Herbert's *Serenade for String Orchestra*, Op. 12, dating from 1884 and written in the pre-World War I operetta style that made the cellist-composer famous. "Aufzug" preceded the Mumford, and "Polonaise," "Liebes-Scene," "Canzonetta," and "Finale" ended the hour-long program. Although some moments sounded under-rehearsed, it was fun to hear this delightfully dated, light salon music (cue the potted palms).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 10, 2018.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)