

Cleveland Orchestra Fridays@7 with Philippe Herreweghe (Feb. 14)

by Daniel Hathaway



The Cleveland Orchestra — or at least half of it — marked Valentine’s Day with a straight-through, 50-minute concert led by Belgian early music guru Philippe Herreweghe. The February 14 performance, marketed as a romantic evening of orchestral classics, played to a packed house (marketing works!).

Making a much belated debut with the Orchestra, Herreweghe led highly inflected performances of Beethoven’s *Overture to Egmont* and Mozart’s 41st Symphony, and treated the audience to some dryly humorous patter as a prelude and during

changeovers.

Noting that Count Egmont of Goethe’s play had been executed only 200 meters from his house, Herreweghe introduced the overture with a rundown on the history of its Dutch namesake, who turned out the population to fight against the Spanish occupation of the Netherlands.

The red-blooded performance that followed embodied nobility and heroism. Accents were bold, dynamics were carefully calculated for dramatic effect, and certain effects like the horn calls toward the end were given hair-raising prominence.

The other concerts in this weekend set clustered around the Beethoven Violin Concerto. Its omission on Friday evening gave the extra weight and importance to Mozart’s “Jupiter” Symphony that the piece deserves.

Marshalling its best chamber music instincts and training, the Orchestra gave K. 551 a superlative reading, matching Herreweghe's brisk tempos and making kid's stuff out of difficult passagework.

Herreweghe cast new light on the stunning chord progressions in the second movement, set a noble pace and character for the minuet, and dialed up the tempo in the hyper-contrapuntal finale to create a breathtaking momentum.

And the other half of the orchestra? On Sunday, they played a Community Concert in Lakewood at the same hour their colleagues were wrapping up their weekend at Severance Hall. Plenty of musicians to go around.

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