

## Review

**Cleveland POPS Orchestra —  
"Ballroom with a Twist" (November 9)**

by Guytano Parks



Severance Hall sizzled on Saturday night as fifteen stellar performers from TV's *Dancing with the Stars*, *So You Think You Can Dance* and *American Idol* took to the stage in *Ballroom with a Twist*. This razzle-dazzle production presented by Scott Stander with choreography by Louis van Amstel and Patricia Kaniowski as dance captain, music editing by Will Hollis, costumes by Randall Designs and lighting by Michael White — opened the Cleveland POPS Orchestra's 18th season under founding artistic director and conductor Carl Topilow's baton on a spectacular note.

Topilow led his orchestra in a tantalizing taste of the music of Henry Mancini as an overture to the evening. Among the most prolific and celebrated of film composers, Mancini "grew up just a stone's throw away in Little Italy," as Topilow said from the stage in his brief comments after conducting a rousing *The*

*Great Waldo Pepper March*. Flutist Mary Kay Robinson then made her way to the front of the stage to play a very cool, laid-back theme from the *Pink Panther* which was followed by the orchestra in a funky and energetic *Baby Elephant Walk* from *Hatari*.

*The Days of Wine and Roses* was seductively romantic with lush, legato string playing. Topilow said in his introduction, "you may hear it like you've never heard it before," and demonstrated by playing his clarinet as the song repeated, up-tempo and jazzy. Also featured were trumpet and trombone solos in repeat verses as the piano, bass and drums joined in before the song ended as soothingly as it had begun. The theme from the TV series *Peter Gunn* ended the Mancini segment with driving percussion and prominent brass, finding Topilow and the POPS to be totally in the groove with this music.

During intermission, Severance Hall's stage was transformed into a quasi dance hall for *Ballroom with a Twist*. Featured performers were dancers Jonathan Roberts (also concert host), Oksana Dmytrenko and Lilit Avagyan from *Dancing with the Stars*, Randi Lynn Strong, Jonathan Platero, Legacy and Jaymz Tuaileva from *So You Think You Can Dance*, additional dancers Patricia Kaniowski, Alla Kocherga, CJ Blair, Serge Onik, Tony Pututau and Tessa Murphy, plus vocalists Von Smith and Gina Glocksen from *American Idol*.

This well-constructed, colorfully-costumed and fast-paced spectacle included many dance styles — samba, rumba, tango, salsa, foxtrot, waltz, quickstep, jive, breakdance and ballet — and fusions and combinations of these styles. The twenty-five musical selections which led into one another (with pauses at times for catching of breaths) were effectively performed with stylistic appropriateness by the POPS as conductor Topilow (donning a shimmery purple jacket) remained ever-attentive to the dancers' many changes in tempo, style and dynamics. *Five guys named Moe*, *Early in the Morning* and *Choo Choo Ch'boogie* were exciting and energetic and led into a soulful *Feeling Good*, sung by Von Smith, which later picked up in tempo and drama with driving triplet beats.

Vocalist Gina Glocksen's *I've Got Rhythm* included some scatting and was paired with *Singing In The Rain* which was alluringly danced with the POPS now sounding like a 1952 movie studio orchestra. At this point, dancer and concert host Jonathan Roberts spoke to the audience while the other dancers took a moment to breathe, talking about how wonderful it is to dance with a live orchestra rather than to recorded tracks.

The program's most poignant moment came when Topilow played a ballad on his clarinet while Legacy looked on, listening and reacting in what appeared to be an improvisational, expressive breakdance-ballet, drawing a collective gasp of astonishment from the audience.

When it was time for another breather, host Roberts had the audience stand up as he led a mini dance lesson: step, point, turn, shimmy and shake. At one point during a Latin song, Topilow stepped down from the podium and partnered red-hot fringe and sequin costumed vocalist Glocksen in a few dance steps as well. The other musical selections included *Gravity* (Glocksen), *Techno Paso*, *Without Love* (Smith and Glocksen), *You can't stop the Beat*, *Walkin in Memphis* (Glocksen), *Girls Gone Wild*, *The Prayer* (Glocksen, Smith and concertmaster Carol Ruzicka) in addition to *When You Say You Love Me*, *Italian Job*, *Havana*, *Batacuda Samba*, *Suavemente*, *Quiereme Mucho*, *Guantanamera*, *Ran Kan Kan*, *Zoot Suit Riot* and *Swingtime*.

From the tantalizing taste of the music of Mancini, to the sizzling sampling of *Ballroom with a Twist*, this Cleveland POPS Orchestra concert was a sure-fire hit as it showcased standout dance performances ranging from the athletic, intricate, gravity-defying, and quicksilver to the exuberant, sensual and passionate.

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