

## Review

### CityMusic Cleveland — Music from the Viennese Waltz Kings at Fairmount (Dec. 4)

by Guytano Parks



Conductor Stefan Willich, President of the Hanns Eisler Music Conservatory in Berlin and the Founder and Conductor of the World Doctors Orchestra, led CityMusic Cleveland in an entertaining program entitled *Music from the Viennese Waltz Kings* at Fairmount Presbyterian Church on Wednesday, December 4.

The first of five consecutive concerts performed in Cleveland area churches, it opened the second series of the orchestra's 10th anniversary season, and featured soloists Stacey Mastrian, soprano and Jack Sutte, trumpet. Mastrian is the 2013 winner of the Resphi prize and is a versatile artist whose repertoire spans from the Renaissance to the present. Sutte joined The Cleveland Orchestra as second trumpet in 1999, having previously played principal trumpet in the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Norway.

The Overture to *Die Fledermaus* (The Bat) by Johann Strauss, II is one of the most familiar and beloved of curtain-openers. It resonated brightly throughout the church with an exuberantly played opening and delightful legato melodies played over effervescent pizzicati. The chamber orchestra responded to Willich with colorful and nuanced playing, transitioning gracefully between contrasting sections.

Johann Nepomuk Hummel's *Trumpet Concerto*, played brilliantly by Jack Sutte, benefited from an elegantly refined sound by the orchestra. Balance and blend were excellent as the exposition led up to the bright and bold entrance of the trumpet. Sutte commanded a wide range of tonal color, with clear articulations and melodic phrasing. The *Andante's* sustained sense of drama was enhanced by Sutte's expressive playing of long lyrical lines, adorned with stylish ornaments and trills.

The *Rondo (Allegro)* was teeming with rhythmic energy as more variations of tone color and character distinguished contrasting sections. Sutte's double-tonguing technique for a rapid-fire effect of fast, well-articulated notes, and his ascending series of trills toward the end were executed with skill and virtuosity. Conductor and orchestra were consummate partners throughout, especially during this rollicking finale.

*On the Beautiful Blue Danube* — *Waltz* by Johann Strauss II opened with a sense of foreshadowing, swelling with hints of what was to come. Flexible rhythms and a keen sense of the Viennese tradition prevailed. Then came the "Laughing Song" and "Adele's Aria" from *Die Fledermaus* sung by soprano Stacey Mastrian. She warbled delightfully above the orchestra, delivering gloriously on the high notes. Her diction was clear as she characterized Adele, infusing the role with humor and charm.

The *Tritsch-Tratsch* ('chit chat') Polka was light and zesty and glittered with precise and agile playing by all sections of the orchestra. Mastrian took to the stage again in the "Gypsy Song" from *The Gypsy Baron*, a combination of Hungarian and Viennese styles. Dark and foreboding text ("Man, watch your horse! Woman, watch your child!") punctuated by the soprano's sharply clipped consonants, in addition to the open fourths and fifths played by the violins at cadences, added to the distinctive gypsy sound of this music.

A melancholy air with moments of sweetness amongst the bittersweet pervaded Josef Strauss's *Aus der Ferne - Polka - Mazurka*. The orchestra again achieved a splendid balance and blend. The final sustained chord which swelled then faded was lovely. Mastrian then sang her final aria, "Vilja Song" from *The Merry Widow*. A chipper introduction, beautifully played by the woodwinds, led way to the melodious song. The violins created a heavenly aura, playing with a hushed, silvery sheen which cast a spell on the scene as the soprano tenderly and poignantly delivered the lyric. The capacity crowd took to their feet in a prolonged ovation upon its conclusion.

According to the program notes, "*Any Viennese concert worthy of the name has to finish with the Radetzky March by the man who started it all, Johann Strauss I.*" And, of course, the audience can't help but clap along, especially when encouraged by the conductor, as was the case on this occasion. Rhythmic, light-hearted and inspirational, this march ended CityMusic Cleveland's "Viennese New Year's Concert" on the printed page. But one more treat was in store for listeners: Johann Strauss II's expansive and soaring *Emperor Waltz*. It's remarkable how a few perfectly placed strokes of the timpani can add so much buoyancy to a lilt!

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