

Review**CIM@Severance: "A Celebration of Community" through Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (March 28)**

by Guytano Parks



Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9 in d* ("Choral") stood alone on the program as a symbol of brotherhood and joy in a concert entitled *A Celebration of Community* at Severance Hall last Friday evening, March 28. Cleveland Institute of Music president Joel Smirnoff conducted the CIM Orchestra with the combined forces of vocal soloists from CIM and the community, Cleveland School of The Arts instrumentalists (Dianna Richardson, department head and director of the orchestral

program) and chorus (William B. Woods, choir director), The Singers' Club of Cleveland (Dr. Melvin P. Unger, choral director) and members of The Antioch Baptist Church Sanctuary Choir.

The free concert drew a capacity audience, and those who were unable to obtain a pass were able to enjoy it over the radio in a live broadcast on WCLV 104.9 FM.

The opening movement's open fifths and fragmented themes, full of dotted rhythms and effective dynamic contrasts, was handled quite admirably by Smirnoff whose extroverted and expressive conducting produced marvelous results from the orchestra. Precise playing with fine balances from the various orchestral sections defined the second movement *Scherzo*, while the timpani added much to the nervous energy and character. Long, legato lines ebbed and flowed, surging and subsiding in the rapturous third movement. The strings achieved a lovely sound and the woodwinds blended beautifully as deceptive harmonies and cadences created a sense of wonder in this remarkably cohesive and profound performance.

From the onset, the last movement teemed with power and purpose. Smirnoff's choices of tempi, his unerring sense of direction, and dramatic timing of pauses was very good. Baritone Brian Johnson's opening solo resonated decisively. The combined choruses sang as one, with clear diction and expression. After the frenzied chase section, the great mo-

ment when the full orchestra and chorus swell up jubilantly in the *Ode to Joy* was glorious.



The other soloists comprising the quartet, tenor Vinson Cole (CIM voice faculty), mezzo-soprano Samantha Gossard and soprano Catheryne Shuman (both CIM alumni), sang clearly and expressively, blending and complimenting each other beautifully despite the composer's difficult and unforgiving vocal writing.

Beethoven's monumental creation, based on Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, is about as close to heaven on earth as one may ever get. This performance was a revelation as the combined forces of instrumentalists, vocal soloists and choruses performed extremely well together. The prolonged ovation at the conclusion was uproarious.

Credit must be given to conductor Smirnoff and to instrumental and chorus directors Richardson, Woods and Unger for their roles in the unification of this formidable endeavor, bringing the deep and everlasting message of brotherhood to the community through music.

Photos by Roger Mastroianni.

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