

Review: Cleveland Orchestra Lakewood Residency: Community Concert at Lakewood Civic (May 24)

by Guytano Parks



The Cleveland Orchestra performed a concert at Lakewood Civic Auditorium last Saturday evening, May 24, the last of fifteen free public events in its 2014 neighborhood residency, “At Home in Lakewood.” The featured soloist was the orchestra's principal trombone, Massimo La Rosa, and music director Franz Welser-Möst conducted. The event was broadcast live on WCLV 104.9 FM, streamed through the orchestra's own website, and recorded by IdeaStream WVIZ/PBS for telecast on Friday, May 30 at 9:00 pm. Excitement ran high as the 2,000 seat Civic Auditorium filled to capacity well before curtain time.

The exuberance of the opening bars of Richard Strauss’s richly colorful tone poem, *Don Juan*, set into motion a performance notable for extremely clean and precise playing by all sections of the orchestra, with an abundance of marvelous solo contributions. Welser-Möst kept everything under exacting control, mustering up quite a bit of gusto, and shaping phrases that spoke beyond mere perfection of execution. The audience cheered heartily at the conclusion.

Massimo La Rosa was featured in Ferdinand David’s *Concertino in E-flat*. A remarkable musician with an uncanny command of sound, la Rosa is able to transform the trombone into an instrument with the qualities of a fine *bel canto* singer. Always highly expressive no matter the register or complexity of the writing, he also displayed great virtuosity in rapid passages with tricky figurations.

Welser-Möst kept the orchestra properly lightweight and balanced, but with presence in the *Allegro maestoso*, supporting the soloist at all times with spirited playing and a wide range of dynamics. The *Funeral March* was especially striking with its dotted rhythms in the orchestra under the trombone's plaintive, sustained tones. The final *Allegro maestoso* boasted more bravura playing by the soloist in rapid passages. Throughout, La Rosa displayed masterly control of tone over the entire range of the instrument. He

received an ovation befitting that of a rock star.

Some have called The Cleveland Orchestra “the most European sounding of the American orchestras,” a feature aptly illustrated by the pieces which concluded this concert. An innate feel for the unwritten aspects of the Viennese style — refinement, subtlety and elegance, along with that certain lilt — is what many attempt to emulate, but in which few succeed. Residents of Lakewood were fortunate to have heard three offerings by Johann Strauss Jr. which demonstrated these qualities: *Waltz: From the Mountains* “*Aus den Bergen*,” “Czardas” from *Ritter Pazman*, and the Overture to *Die Fledermaus*.

From the Mountains began gently, with a feeling of anticipation. The flute introduced a passage that led slowly into the waltz melody. It had its intended tentative feel without an obvious pulse before it built up momentum until the dance was in full swing. Transitions were handled deftly, and wondrous harmonic changes and colorful surprises abounded in this joyous performance.

The yearning strains and impassioned gypsy sweep of the Czardas was positively thrilling. Excitement built to a fever pitch during this breathless reading, and the *Fledermaus* overture, one of the best known and loved in the literature, provided plenty of its own delights. Effervescent phrases soared above pizzicato pulses, and there was plenty of Viennese lilt and nuance throughout. The fleet coda was clean as a whistle as it accelerated toward its final notes, garnering an immediate standing ovation with prolonged, uproarious applause for The Cleveland Orchestra and Franz Welser-Möst.

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