

Cleveland Orchestra at Home in Lakewood: concert at Mahall's (May 23)

by Carlyn Kessler, Special Contributor



On Friday night, May 23, a quartet of Cleveland Orchestra musicians — Isabel Trautwein and Katherine Bormann, violins, Sonja Braaten Molloy, viola, and Tanya Ell, cello — performed at Mahall's, a combination restaurant, bar, and vintage bowling alley with a friendly, Brooklyn-esque atmosphere.

Seated in the open concert venue, audience members of all ages enjoyed the quartet's repertoire ranging from Brandenburg concertos to Mozart and even crowd-pleasing Beatles arrangements of *Yesterday* and *Eleanor Rigby*. The atmosphere was that of a casual summer concert — the room was filled with chairs, but passersby also enjoyed the music from the outside, leaning over the rails to catch a glimpse of the packed venue.

The four instrumentalists would intersperse their “sets” with comments, focusing on themes such as vibrato or repetition, with “pop quizzes.” Audience members could win TCO concert tickets in exchange for correct answers to trivia questions, such as “The Cleveland Orchestra performed in Lakewood in which decade?” (Answer: the nineteen-teens, specifically 1919).

Katherine Bormann led a demonstration on vibrato in which she described the method she used as a child for learning the technique, which consisted of filling a film canister with rice and shaking the canister in rhythm, eventually imitating this motion at the instrument. She said, “If your parents don't go crazy, you eventually learn how to vibrate, and then hopefully it becomes a tool. It's an expressive tool, and it hopefully becomes more natural sounding.” The audience happily applauded as the violinist demonstrated her *current*, richly beautiful vibrato.

She proceeded to explain the differences in sound with using vibrato or no vibrato. The quartet played three pieces with little or no vibrato, including a Bach chorale, a Mozart

quartet, and *Yesterday*. After the final set, there was a question and answer session between the quartet and the audience.



Isabel Trautwein made reference to the history of the orchestra and its involvement in the greater Cleveland community: “Cleveland’s Orchestra [as it was then called] was meant as an educational tool to build audiences so that people would come hear the fantastic orchestras at the time that would come here, like the New York Philharmonic and the Chicago Symphony. And then eventually a conductor came and said, ‘Wait, we don’t need to have fantastic orchestras come from out of town. Why don’t we just make this one really great?’ And that’s what it’s been since about the 1930s.” In exchanges after the concert, the quartet members commented on how receptive the audiences have been at each Lakewood venue and how special it has been to be able to connect with audiences on a personal level.

Photos by Carlyn Kessler.

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