

## Cleveland Orchestra Season Finale with Vladimir Jurowski and Simone Lamsma (May 29)



by Daniel Hathaway

The Cleveland Orchestra's production of Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen* was a tough act to follow, but the last concert of the Severance Hall season under guest conductor Vladimir Jurowski proved to be anything but anti-climactic. A sumptuous performance of an hour-long suite from Prokofiev's ballet, *Cinderella*, a spellbinding reading of Britten's *Violin Concerto* by Simone Lamsma and the opportunity to hear a very early Stravinsky work, the *Scherzo fantastique, op. 3*, added up to a surprisingly brilliant season finale. I heard the first of two concerts on Thursday, May 29.

Simone Lamsma's appearance with the orchestra was remarkable on several counts. The Dutch violinist stepped in on short notice to replace her ailing countrywoman, Janine Jansen. She agreed to play the same concerto — a piece not all violinists keep under their fingers. And she played the Britten with consummate skill and complete authority, obviously winning many converts to a piece that can be difficult to wrap your ears around.

The Britten concerto is abstract music, motiv-driven and formally rigorous (its last movement is a quasi-passacaglia), but an attractive, lyrical sheen envelops much of the piece. Unusual among Britten's works, the concerto wasn't written with an individual in mind, but it still makes extraordinary technical demands on the soloist.

Lamsma met all of Britten's challenges superbly and put the concerto across with a deep sense of commitment. She commanded the complete attention of the audience during the

dramatic cadenza, eventually winning an enthusiastic and well-deserved ovation at the end of the work.

Roughly half of the music Prokofiev wrote for the 1945 ballet, *Cinderella*, made up the second half of the concert (after suffering alterations by the Bolshoi's music staff, the composer restored and published the score in 1946).



Jurowski provided projected supertitles for the events in the familiar fairy tale, though the detailed scenario in the program book was quite enough to guide the audience through the music, which is easy to follow on its own, even without dancers to watch. (Had you kept your eye on both, there were amusing differences between the two: one ugly stepsister was “Fatty” in the program book and “Dumpy” in the titles; the prince “collapsed lumpily onto his throne” in the one, and “sat in it like a saddle” on the other; Cinderella dropped her slipper “from her pocket” in the titles and “from her bosom” in the book.)

Prokofiev's score is rich and colorful and The Cleveland Orchestra realized it in vivid and darkly glorious sound — and with amazing stamina, considering the length and fullness of the orchestration.

The evening began with Stravinsky's *Scherzo fantastique* from 1908, heard only once before at Severance Hall by The Cleveland Orchestra under Pierre Boulez in 1994. It's an odd piece that seems to have Mendelssohn in its ear but never quite achieves that composer's magical lightness. Jurowski's conducting was strangely wooden, nearly robotic, both in the Britten and the Stravinsky. Apparently more in his element in the Prokofiev, he seemed to relax and his gestures became more sweeping and expressive.

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