

Review: Nature takes a part in Blossom concert (July 28)

By Daniel Hautzinger



The environment in which you hear music has a potent influence on a concert experience. Obviously, the acoustics and size of a hall impact the sound, but physical surroundings can also intrude upon the music or affect the way you perceive a work. This is especially true at outdoor venues like Blossom Music Center, where nature decided to take a role in the music on July 26, when the Kent/Blossom Chamber Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, pianist Stephen Hough, and conductors Brett Mitchell and John Storgårds presented a three-part concert there.

The elements made their most obvious appearance during Liszt's First Piano Concerto, which Hough brilliantly performed with Storgårds and The Cleveland Orchestra. As Hough began a trill near the end of a cadenza in the first movement, an earth-shaking thunderclap caused him (and many other people in the pavilion) to jump in surprise. But he launched back into the trill with barely a moment's hesitation, holding it while the audience laughed and applauded before continuing the piece.

The heart-stopping interruption and pouring rain did nothing to ruffle Hough's focused composure. His shaping of the second movement nocturne was lovely, especially when he tucked graceful broken chords beneath another sparkling trill. Hough's and the orchestra's quicksilver changes in mood and color complemented the slivery tingling of the triangle in the third movement. The carefree attitude continued into the finale (all four movements are played without interruption). The piece ended electrically, with lightning flashing both from Hough's flying fingers and from the sky.

Hough followed the concerto with an intimate encore, Grieg's delicate Nocturne no. 4, op. 54. Storgårds and the orchestra preceded the Liszt with an emphatic and well-paced performance of Beethoven's Overture to *Fidelio*.

An entrancing musical journey closed the concert: Sibelius's Second Symphony, for which The Cleveland Orchestra and Kent/Blossom students joined forces in a "side-by-side" under Storgårds.



The pounding rain and the curved wooden boards of the Blossom pavilion combined with the Nordic majesty of Sibelius's score and a dramatic, sweeping performance to transform the pavilion into a great ship tossed by a tempestuous sea, especially in the doomy second and fourth movements. Storgårds artfully shaped the pizzicato bass line of the former, while bassoonists Barrick Stees and Phillip Austin played with nuance and impeccable blend in their duet above the plucked notes. The brass excelled in both reverential and glorious passages, and the augmented power of the large string section heightened the impact of the performance.



The evening began with Brett Mitchell conducted the Kent/Blossom Chamber Orchestra in Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* and Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, the composer's orchestration of four movements from the six movement piano suite of the same name. The Chamber Orchestra is comprised of college and graduate students from the Kent/Blossom Music Festival, which takes place at nearby Kent State University every summer.

Despite a rather slow tempo and initial uncertainty in the *Siegfried Idyll*, Mitchell carefully blended and brought out different voices for a sweetly tender performance of Wagner's surprise birthday gift to his wife Cosima.

Tombeau seemed to emanate from the forest around Blossom, with fluid melodies and magical orchestral textures calling to

mind flittering birds and scampering wildlife. Oboist Mary Riddell's many solos were supple and smooth.

On Saturday night, the two elemental forces of an orchestra and nature clashed to create a unique and exciting experience. Such is the power of music and the outdoors.

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