

## Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra at Severance Hall (November 23)

by Jane Berkner



It was a treat to be reminded of the brightness of the orchestral world's future on Sunday night, November 23 in Severance Hall. For that occasion, artistic director Brett Mitchell designed a terrific concert for the opening of The Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra's 2014-2015 season.

Mitchell's well-crafted choices for challenging the young musicians began with the first piece on the concert. John Adams wrote *The Chairman Dances: Foxtrot for Orchestra* as a kind of

warm-up exercise in preparation for composing his opera *Nixon in China*. He envisioned it as a "foxtrot" for Chairman Mao and his wife, a former Shanghai movie actress. Adams wrote, "The music takes full cognizance of her past... Themes, sometimes slinky and sentimental, at other times bravura and bounding, ride above a bustling fabric of energized motives."

The piece demands rhythmic maturity with its insistent, repetitive inner sub-divisions. Mitchell was a clear and concise conductor, keeping the orchestra from falling off the tracks as instruments jumped on and off the ongoing rhythmic line. Pianist Yun Cao also deserved credit for his steady playing.

COYO's string section is particularly adept at creating long lyric lines. This became apparent when they interrupted Adams's continuous rhythmic activity with the beguiling melodic section and ardent portrayal of the foxtrot.

Though Roy Harris's *Symphony No. 3* is delineated into five sections, the work is

presented in one movement. Mitchell led a simple, straightforward performance, effectively evoking the distinct style of early twentieth-century American music.

Kudos to COYO for such well-executed solo playing in the many dialogues among woodwind and brass players. The brass distinguished themselves in the fugue and the climax, where the percussionists joined them in a strong display of power. It was a nice contrast to the percussion soli section ending of the previous, more sultry foxtrot.

In the second half, COYO presented a fine performance of Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 4* that embraced the work's drama and scope. Though the brass section seemed less comfortable with Tchaikovsky's Romantic style, there was much beautiful woodwind solo playing throughout. The fiery tempo of the last movement brought the audience to its feet.

The concert was thoroughly satisfying by itself, yet the audience also had the opportunity to attend a prelude concert of chamber music downstairs in Reinberger Chamber Hall before the orchestral concert began. Five groups of students chosen from the orchestra's ranks presented quartets and quintets with varied combinations of strings and winds.

A great deal of musical mastery and maturity was displayed in this delightful chamber concert offering. Each group had been coached by a member of The Cleveland Orchestra, and three of the five groups included the coach performing alongside the student musicians. It was exciting to witness the results of this fantastic approach to musical pedagogy, the perfect beginning to a completely enjoyable evening of music.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 25, 2014.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)