

ChamberFest Celebrates “FRANK!” (June 19)



by Mike Telin

On Thursday, June 19, a standing-room-only crowd gathered in Kulas Hall at the Cleveland Institute of Music to hear clarinetist Franklin Cohen perform works by Reich, Brahms and Mozart. From start to finish Cohen proved that he is, without a doubt, one of the greatest musicians of our time.

Presented as part of ChamberFest Cleveland, and in keeping with this year’s festival theme of “Crossing Borders,” the concert, simply titled “FRANK!,” was a celebration in honor of Cohen as he nears his own border crossing — after serving for nearly 40 years as the principal clarinet of The Cleveland Orchestra, he will say “so long” to the orchestra and embark on new musical and life projects.

The evening began with comments from Cohen’s son, Alexander, and daughter, Diana (ChamberFest co-artistic director), who, along with making some humorous remarks about their father, highlighted a few of Cohen’s musical accomplishments. Those honors included his winning the 1968 Munich Competition as well as his 1996 Grammy Award-winning recording of the Debussy *Première Rhapsodie* with Pierre Boulez and The

Cleveland Orchestra. Frank Cohen, who was obviously humbled by the event, spoke eloquently about his children and their late mother Lynette. After he thanked the audience for being there, the concert got under way. From then on, it was all about superb music making.

Written in 1985, Steve Reich's *New York Counterpoint for Amplified Clarinet and Tape* is a captivating work which calls for the soloist to pre-record ten clarinet and bass clarinet parts and then play the eleventh part live against the tape. Composed in three movements, fast-slow-fast, and played without pause, *New York Counterpoint* is full of sudden tempo changes and musical lines that jump from one end of the instruments' registers' to the other. Cohen played effortlessly and completely in sync with the tape. Although not required, the addition of real-time video projections by T. Paul Lowry enhanced the listening experience. Performing on a darkened stage, with a combination of colorful dots and images of Manhattan darting across the walls, Cohen looked like a rock-star in front of the mosh pit.

The *Quintet in B Minor for Clarinet and Strings* by Brahms is a sublime work that makes it easy for listeners to become entranced by the composer's lush melodic lines. However, this performance by violinists Yura Lee and Diana Cohen, violist Dimitri Murrath, cellist Peter Wiley, and Franklin Cohen was awe-inspiring. Every phrase was perfectly shaped and balanced. Throughout the performance, the ensemble produced a darkly-hued sound which added an extra layer of richness to the work's autumnal mood. At the end of the fourth and concluding movement, the ensemble's final chord dramatically diminished into silence. Appropriately, the audience held their applause, not wanting to break the spell that had been cast upon them.



The second half consisted of a single work, Mozart's *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra in A Major*. Although Cohen has performed the concerto countless times and recorded it with Christoph von Dohnányi and The Cleveland Orchestra, this performance was unforgettable. Cohen owned the work from start to finish, tossing off the opening movement's numerous scales and chordal passages with rapid-fire precision. His inner opera singer showed through during the slow and melodic middle movement. The finale, "Rondo: Allegro" was lighthearted, as Cohen playfully ornamented here and there, adding spice to Mozart's frolicsome music. Never once did the soloist and the outstanding ChamberFest All-Star Orchestra led by concertmaster Amy Schwartz Moretti stray apart from each other. This was an orchestra comprising the best chamber music players in the business, and it showed — the performance was chamber music at its best. The audience rewarded soloist and orchestra with an immediate standing ovation. Cohen acknowledged his colleagues with his own applause, but when he returned to the stage and asking the orchestra stand, they graciously refused. This was a night to celebrate "FRANK!"

Photos by Gary Adams.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 23, 2015.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)