

## Earth and Air: String Orchestra — debut at St. Paul's, Cleveland Heights (Oct. 8)

by J.D. Goddard



The newest addition to Cleveland's classical music scene, Earth and Air: String Orchestra, made its debut on Thursday, October 8 in Tucker Hall at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights. Founder and director David Ellis chose a challenging program entitled "Prague Serenades" that featured Antonín Dvořák's *Serenade for Strings*, Op. 22, and

the *Serenade*, Op. 6 by Dvořák's student (and son-in-law), Josef Suk.

A small but appreciative audience was on hand to hear the 16-member ensemble, who performed with youthful sincerity and enthusiasm, filling Tucker Hall with beautiful Romantic melodies.

From the beginning of the Dvořák, Ellis and his ensemble captured the five-movement work's lush harmonies and Bohemian allure. After the *Moderato* first movement, the opening theme of the second movement, "Tempo di Valse," charmed with its simple harmonies. The end of the Scherzo, where the themes are recalled, was especially attractive.

It is difficult to understand why Suk's *Serenade* is not played more often: it captivated completely on this first hearing, demonstrating much more depth than merely a charming outing for a string orchestra.

The opening movement immediately revealed Earth and Air's warm, resonant, and unforced tone. They played with lush vibrato — lithe and supple — with just the right amount of sentimentality. The interplay of the inner voices was delightfully clear. In the

Adagio, which began with a flowing cello solo that was echoed softly by the violins, the violas achieved a distinctively dark, mellow tone. This tender, soft beginning moved on to an impassioned climax where all the complex inner parts made their full effect.



The final movement was quickly paced but deeply dramatic in its interpretation. Ellis, who ably kept everything together, was prudent in his attention to detail, at one point calmly erasing an errant violin entrance. Hats off to concertmaster Solomon Liang, principal second violin Koko Watanabe, violist Cynthia Black, and cellist Sophie Benn for their outstanding solo contributions throughout.

Earth and Air's fervor and unbridled spirit at times bested them: their technique and intonation wavered ever so slightly, and some transitions were in need of more finesse. Time, maturity, and more experience as an ensemble will help this welcome addition to Cleveland's music scene become a more cohesive, consistent string orchestra. All of the parts and pieces are there.

The ensemble plans two more concerts this season, both in Tucker Hall at St. Paul's. On Friday, January 29 at 7:30 pm, a program entitled "In the White Silence" will feature music by Grammy and Pulitzer award-winning composer John Luther Adams. A concert entitled "de Las Americas" will be presented on Friday, April 8 at 7:30 pm.

*Rehearsal photos by Alex Belisle.*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 20, 2015.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*  
[Return to the Front Page.](#)