

## Cleveland Orchestra & Cleveland Orchestra Chorus in Haydn & Duruflé with Matthew Halls (Nov. 17)

by Daniel Hathaway



Maurice Duruflé's *Requiem* is probably one of the best-beloved and most-performed choral works of the 20th century, but for reasons of economy, it's most frequently heard in the composer's reduction for organ, strings, and optional trumpets, harp and timpani — or even in the version for voices and organ alone. On Thursday evening, November 17 at Severance Hall, a stage full of Cleveland Orchestra musicians joined the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus under the baton of

Matthew Halls to bring the full tonal spectrum of Duruflé's Gregorian-fueled masterpiece to life.

The 130-voice Chorus was in robust fettle for the occasion, whether floating chant melodies with chaste yet sumptuous tone, exclaiming triumphant climaxes, or weaving its vocal lines into a transparent fugal texture. Prepared by Robert Porco, the COC's diction was unflinching clear, its rhythm precise even in soft-edged passages, and its blend with the Orchestra admirable at all dynamic levels.

Soloists who added colorful orchestral colors to the mix included English hornists Frank Rosenwein and Robert Walters (in a duet in the "Christe eleison," Walters alone later), cellist Richard Weiss, flutist Joshua Smith — later echoed by Joela Jones's flute solo on the organ — and hornist Hans Clebsch. Strings playing scratchy, nervous tremolos near the bridge provided a long, chilling moment in the "Domine Jesu Christe."

To good effect, Halls chose to replace the optional male soloist with the whole bass section of the chorus. That left only one soloist onstage: mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, whose all-too-brief "Pie Jesu" (with cellist Richard Weiss) was a standout moment in the

*Requiem*. Duruflé's heartfelt music requires the soloist to sing at the extremes of her range, and Cooke rose to the challenge with her strong, even tone and expressive delivery of the text.

The very French *Requiem* followed intermission. By way of contrast, the first half of Thursday evening's concert was devoted to Austrian music — Joseph Haydn's *Te Deum for the Empress Maria Therese*, and Franz Schubert's self-titled "Tragic" *Symphony No. 4 in c-minor*.

Commissioned by the Empress — herself a soprano who was featured in the premiere of the *Theresienmesse* in 1799 — Haydn's work is an efficient 10-minute setting of a long liturgical text that some wags in church music circles have dubbed the "Tedium."

Written in one continuous movement with three sections, Haydn's *Te Deum* breezes along, setting the text in choral unisons and a catchy fugue, only changing gears briefly for a more meditative central section. The final petition, *Non confundar in aeternum*, is sung to an almost cheeky syncopated motive echoed by the orchestra. A kinetic figure on the podium, Halls led the Chorus and Orchestra in a bright, ebullient performance, stressing the work's symphonic qualities.

Halls followed the Haydn with the Schubert symphony, written when the composer was 19. A gripping, precocious piece, its opening movement dallies almost dangerously with repeated melodic motives and ends with a wickedly fast coda. In the Andante, oboist Jeffrey Rathbun counterposed Schubert's beautiful melody against the string textures, a feature that happily came around more than once.

The Menuetto boasted a Trio with arresting, off-beat accents, the finale a series of odd starts, stops and contrasting moods. Altogether, the symphony is an impressive achievement for a young composer who obviously knows about Beethoven, but has already found his own voice. Schubert would surely have been ecstatic to hear such a thoughtful and revealing performance as Matthew Halls and The Cleveland Orchestra gave his piece on Thursday evening.

*This concert will be repeated on Saturday, November 19 at 8:00 pm, and on Sunday, November 20 at 3:00 pm.*

*Photo by Roger Mastroianni from a previous Cleveland Orchestra and Chorus performance.*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 19, 2016.*

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