

## Cleveland Orchestra Family Concert features “The Magic Firebird” (March 5)

by Robert Rollin



The Cleveland Orchestra Family Concert on Sunday afternoon, March 5 was a delight. The program, titled “The Magic Firebird,” was a collaboration between the Orchestra and the Enchantment Theatre Company.

Guest conductor Ruth Reinhardt led Stravinsky’s *The Firebird* with precision, commenting briefly on each piece and drawing in the young audience. The concert was a terrific success despite limited space onstage.

The darkly mysterious Introduction was gorgeous. The action begins in the Enchanted Garden of the evil Kashchei as Prince Ivan, clad in green forest garb and carrying a bow, hunts for food. After the Firebird appears, she is swept away and Ivan vows to find her. He prepares to kill her, but spares her life. She gives him a magic feather in return, so he can summon her in time of dire need.

The staging depicted the Firebird as a plumed, bright yellow and orange bird, not unlike a peacock, mounted on a pole and carried by an inconspicuous dancer in a white leotard. The interaction between Ivan and the Firebird dancers enlivened the musical flow, among fine horn, oboe, and bassoon solos.

Ivan summons the Firebird, who intervenes when Kashchei’s minions pursue him. The bird makes the monsters perform an animated dance, and the creatures and Kashchei fall into a deep sleep. The Firebird directs Ivan to a tree stump where Kashchei’s casket holds the monster’s soul in an egg. When Ivan destroys the egg, he releases all the magical beings held captive. Everyone celebrates the victory — the dazzling display

onstage included a spinning pole with attached placards.

The tasteful production combined with the fine performance resulted in a successful artistic marriage. Though advertised as enormous puppets, the characters were represented by dancers carrying long poles with mask-like depictions. Kashchei was the most breathtaking: together, three dancers carried the monster's head and hands to give the impression of an enormous creature.

The dancer who played the unicorn, on the other hand, simply wore an animal head and pranced gracefully across the stage in a white leotard. She seemed almost to pause in mid-air between leaps.

The afternoon opened with the Orchestra presenting three short Slavic works from the popular concert repertoire. Dmitri Kabalevsky's pyrotechnical "Galop" from *The Comedians* featured wonderful piccolo and xylophone doublings, magnificent string playing, and fine trumpet obbligatos.

Anatoli Liadov's *Baba Yaga*, based on the Russian folk tale of the deformed flying witch who lives with her two sisters in a house on chicken legs, contrasted dark solos in bass clarinet and bassoon with wonderful tuttis and powerful brasses.

Antonín Dvořák's *Slavonic Dance in A*, Op. 46, No. 5 rounded out the lively set with elegant oboe and clarinet doublings on the main tune, a beautifully played high horn solo, and a fine percussion battery.

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