

Cleveland Orchestra: Mendelssohn & Henze with Julia Fischer (May 11)

by Daniel Hathaway



When the 17-year-old Felix Mendelssohn saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with his sister, he ran right home to write a piano duet on the subject that turned into an overture and later a whole suite of incidental music. Did he have any idea that his music would be inextricably bound to Shakespeare's play —

or its march appropriated for countless wedding recessionals?

The Cleveland Orchestra devoted the second half of its May 11 concert to that overture and incidental music, led by Franz Welser-Möst, with the delightful assistance of the high voices of the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Chorus, soprano Anya Matanovic, mezzo-soprano Emily Fons, and actor Itay Tiran (who channelled a host of characters).

Anyone who is not charmed by Mendelssohn's score, as Shakespeare wrote elsewhere, "is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils." The opening four chords of the Overture cast an immediate spell and bring the listener into an enchanted world where double-tongued snakes and weaving spiders are held at bay by guardian fairies, and bumbling mortals are transmogrified into beasts.

Though Welser-Möst whipped up the tempo in the fast sections of the Overture a bit beyond the point of charm and spaciousness, his pacing of the rest of the incidental

music and his coordination with Tiran were admirable. The flutes shone at the end of the Scherzo, the horns were noble in the Nocturne, and the brass festive in the Wedding March (where percussionist Marc Damoulakis produced a variety of nuanced cymbal clashes).



Situated upstage with the chorus, Matanovic and Fons joined the Youth Chorus in lithe performances of “Ye Spotted Snakes” and “Though the House Give Glimmering Light.” Itay Tiran, though difficult to understand at times, did yeoman work of linking the music to Shakespeare’s words, ending the entire piece with the Puckian gesture of popping his cheek.

The first half of the concert conjured another kind of magic. Hans Werner Henze’s *Il Vitalino raddoppiato* expands on a famous chaconne by Vitali that wormed its way into Henze’s ear as a child. Almost equal parts Vitali and Henze, the work finds the two composers trading material in 4-bar phrases for nearly 25 minutes.

Violinist Julia Fischer was the mesmerizing soloist, dialoguing with the Orchestra and finally going off on her own in an elaborate cadenza. Just when the repetition of bass line and harmony begins to gnaw away at the ear, Henze — in imitation of Vitali — goes off the rails for an unexpected harmonic side trip.



Called back several times, Fischer gave the audience another violin treat — Paganini’s Second Caprice, played with verve, precision, and a wide range of dynamics.

Two more musical items weren’t in the printed program on Thursday. Both were in honor of Mrs. Clara Rankin, who scooped The Cleveland Orchestra by turning 100 a year before her beloved ensemble did. Brought on stage by Welser-Möst, she was serenaded with Schubert’s *An die Musik* and a round of *Happy Birthday*.

Photos by Roger Mastroianni courtesy of The Cleveland Orchestra.

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