

The Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom Music Center (July 29)

by Samantha Spaccasi



The lawn and pavilion of Blossom Music Center hosted an immense crowd on the evening of July 29 for The Cleveland Orchestra's performance of Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 24* with pianist David Fray, and Rachmaninoff's *Symphony No. 2*, skillfully conducted by Vasily Petrenko.

The conductor emphasized the enchanting writing for the wind section and ensured that solos played by flutist Joshua Smith, bassoonist Barrick Stees, clarinetist Dan McKelway, and oboist Frank Rosenwein were given due prominence. Hunched over the piano, Fray communicated closely with the ensemble, producing a strong sense of blend and balance. It was thrilling to watch his fingers deftly dance on the instrument, playing flourishes and cadenzas with captivating style and drama.

He tempered his intensity during the second movement, playing with a graceful, sweet tone and excellent dynamic contrast. Fray and Petrenko paced the third movement well, allowing each change in character to be displayed. Fray's especially anxious, vibrant playing was underscored by a burbling bassoon. The pianist shifted moods dexterously, ranging from pastoral to menacing.

Rachmaninoff's second symphony begins with, the basses and cellos creeping quietly, giving the first movement an underlying sense of mysteriousness. Gloomy winds against high strings' plaintive wails, along with a haunting English horn solo from Robert Walters, created an aura of intense despair. Concertmaster Peter Otto's artistic solos boldly outlined those moods. Trombones, horns, and trumpets played with well-blended, penetrating tones, punctuating the melody and adding vivid color to the work.

Petrenko brought lively energy to the Scherzo, flavored with twinkling glockenspiel. The conductor's strong sense of dynamic contrast was on display — he has an intimate

knowledge how to make the most poignant passages stand out. The strings offered lush and languid tones in soft moments, while in others the brass played with striking power.

Characterized by tender, dreamy playing, the Adagio featured a melting clarinet solo from McKelway. Hornist Esa Tapani warmly intoned the main theme, passing it along Otto, Walters, Smith, and Rosenwein — who each added individuality and style.



Petrenko set a lively pace for the last movement, but still allowed room for the music to breathe. Conductor and ensemble alternated zesty playing with sensitive refinement and riveting excitement. Timpanist Tom Freer and a powerful brass section provided rumbling depth to the performance. The Orchestra and Petrenko ascended to the last of many climaxes triumphantly.

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