

**The Cleveland Orchestra begins 100th Season  
with revival of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen***

by Mike Telin



The Cleveland Orchestra begins its landmark 100th season this week with a revival of Yuval Sharon's critically acclaimed, made-for-Cleveland production of Leoš Janáček's opera *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

Franz Welser-Möst leads the Orchestra and a cast that will include Martina Janková (Vixen), Alan Held (Forrester), Jennifer Johnson Cano (Fox), Andrew Foster-Williams (Harašta), Daryl Freedman (Lapák the Dog), Dashon Burton (Parson/Badger), and David Cangelosi (Schoolmaster/Mosquito).

Performances will take place on Saturday, September 23 at 8:00 pm, Sunday the 24th at 3:00 pm, and Tuesday the 26th at 7:30 pm. Tickets available [online](#). Writing for

[\*Classical Voice North America\*](#), Daniel Hathaway said that the digitally enhanced production was “beguiling in concept and brilliant in execution.”

As part of *ClevelandClassical.com*’s coverage of the original production, we spoke with tenor David Cangelosi. The Northeast Ohio native will once again sing the roles of the Schoolmaster and the Mosquito during the upcoming performances. The following article was published on May 13, 2014.

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Opera librettists take their inspiration from novels, novellas, plays, and legends, but rarely from a daily comic strip. “The Adventures of the Vixen Sharp-Ears,” a serialized cartoon by Rudolf Těsnohlídek and Stanislav Lolek in the Czech newspaper *Lidové noviny* gave Leoš Janáček the idea for his comic opera, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, for which he wrote the libretto himself.

Is it a children’s entertainment? The characters include animals, birds, and insects, as well as a few human beings, but Janáček himself seems to have intended it to be a philosophical reflection about the cycle of life and death. The plot is open to a whole spectrum of interpretation. “But I can tell you that this production will appeal to the widest public components possible,” said tenor David Cangelosi, who sings the roles of the Schoolmaster and the Mosquito. “It just has something for everybody — the littlest of kids straight through to the most seasoned opera- or symphony-goer.”

*The Cunning Little Vixen*, a made-for-Cleveland production designed specifically for Severance Hall and directed by Yuval Sharon, will feature animations by Bill Barminski and Christopher Louie of Walter Robot Studios, projected on three giant screens.

David Cangelosi feels this production is the most innovative multimedia integration he has ever been involved with. He points out that many companies, including the Metropolitan Opera and San Francisco Opera, have incorporated projections into productions, “but this is the first time we’ve been asked to sing with our heads through a porthole and have bodies projected onto us,” he said with a laugh during a recent telephone conversation. “So we are integrated into the projections, not just having them

behind us. It's been hilariously fun because we're being told what to do and which direction to look, while having no idea what our bodies look like — although we were able to see the animations early on during production presentations, so we do have some idea.”

Another feature of the production Cangelosi finds fun is the use of masks. “These masks that have been created for us by Cristina Waltz are incredible. I must say there's been a lot of laughter during rehearsals as we try to get the portholes open and our heads through them. I'm a mosquito, and the mask has this gigantic stinger for a nose. So until I became used to it, I was bumping into everything backstage. It's been really funny.”

Throughout the conversation Cangelosi spoke about the fun he and his fellow cast members are having. He attributes that to the director, Yuval Sharon, who is constantly in a good mood. “He laughs a lot and you can't help but laugh with him. He enjoys a good joke — both telling one and receiving one. And if we struggled a little bit early on, it wasn't the kind of intense struggle that leads to frustration. It's been a struggle that has evoked laughter.”

When first approached about the project, Cangelosi had only a vague idea about the form the production would take. “The earliest reports were that it was going to be a semi-staged *Cunning Little Vixen*.” As time passed, it became clear that this was going to be one of the most innovative productions ever — a fully-staged opera with animated accoutrements.

“Fully-staged” had its own innovative twists. “At first we thought, great, all the audience will see is our faces, so we don't have to learn any staging. This is going to be really easy,” Cangelosi said. “Then we discovered that the portholes were on different levels so we would have to climb different staircases backstage. Then we realized that we would only be animated as animals. When we are in our human incarnations we are going to be onstage in costume complete with wigs.”

The innovations continue with the location of the instrumentalists. “The orchestra will be seated on three different levels using pit formation. Maestro will be on the lowest level with a good portion of the orchestra a short level up, with another portion on the next level. Then you have the stage level — I call it a tiered display. I think that as soon as they enter the hall, even before a note is played, people are going to realize that they are about to see something completely different.”

*Cunning Little Vixen* incorporates both an international and local cast. “Everyone from top to bottom is as first rate as any I have worked with at any opera house anywhere,”

Cangelosi, himself a Parma native, said. “We hope the audiences love it as much as we have had fun preparing it. Because that is exactly what it has been — a great joy.”

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