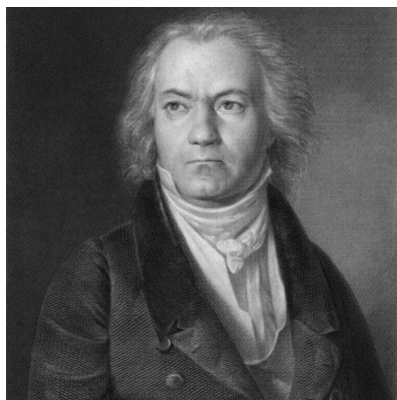


Cleveland Orchestra: Stravinsky and Beethoven share a program, and Igor muses on Ludwig

by Jarrett Hoffman



On Thursday, September 28 at 7:30 pm and Saturday, September 30 at 8:00 pm, The Cleveland Orchestra continues its centennial season at Severance Hall under Music Director Franz Welser-Möst with “The Rite of Spring.” The concert will include Stravinsky’s famously provocative work — which Puccini called “the work of a

madman” — and a string orchestra adaptation of Beethoven’s *Quartet No. 15 in a*, Op. 132.

Should Beethoven, from the grave in Vienna, feel snubbed by the title of the concert, TCO and Welser-Möst will make it up to him on the 29th at 11:00 am at Severance. “Friday Morning: All-Beethoven” features the same a-minor Quartet adaptation and *Leonore Overture No. 3*. Friday bus service will be provided from the [South Side](#), [East Side \(Beachwood\)](#), [West Side](#), and [Akron](#).

Passing the mic to Stravinsky, six feet under on the Isle of San Michele in Venice — how does it feel to share a program with the great German? A 1922 quote suggests, not so good. “I detest Beethoven,” Stravinsky told Marcel Proust in a tense moment at an A-list party in Paris. Other guests included James Joyce, Pablo Picasso, and Sergei Diaghilev. (Years later in *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*, the composer confessed to Robert Craft that he didn’t recognize Joyce at the party.)

Stravinsky’s own account of the evening reframes the comment. In *Conversations*, he said that he would have shared Proust’s enthusiasm for Beethoven’s late quartets “if it had not been a commonplace among the *litterati* of the time, not a musical judgment but a pose.” And to be fair, the party followed the premiere of Stravinsky’s opera *Mavra*, to poor critical reception — possibly not the most tactful time to bring up the big B.

Forty years later, Stravinsky was much clearer in his feelings. Particularly enchanted by the *Große Fuge*, he wrote, “At eighty I have found new joy in Beethoven.” Stephen Spender, a friend of Stravinsky, opens his poem *Late Stravinsky Listening to Late Beethoven* with these words:

“At the end, he listened only to
Beethoven’s Posthumous Quartets.
Some we played so often
You could only hear the needle in the groove.”

(She said, and smiled through her locked tears,
Lightly touching her cheek.)

The Rite of Spring shows Stravinsky at a very different point in his life, age 30. But maybe on Thursday and Saturday this week at Severance, the elder Stravinsky will come around as well, hanging in the air to listen to a Late Quartet one more time.

Yes, lying on your bed under the ceiling,
Weightless as a feather, you became
Free of every self but the transparent
Intelligence through which the music showed
Its furious machine. Delectable to you
Beethoven’s harsh growlings, hammerings,
Crashings on plucked strings, his mockery at
The noises in his head, imprisoning him
In shouting deafness.

—Stephen Spender

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