

BlueWater Chamber Orchestra at the Breen with Mark Kosower & Ken Johnston (Sep. 17)

by Daniel Hathaway



After BlueWater Chamber Orchestra founder Carlton Woods' untimely death in February, the Orchestra decided to continue with his plans for 2017-2018, calling on guest conductors and its own concertmaster to lead the new season's programs. On Sunday afternoon, September 17 at the Breen Center in Ohio City, Octavio Más-Arocas led the ensemble in "The Captivating Cello," and

the captivating cellist was Cleveland Orchestra principal Mark Kosower.

Concertmaster Ken Johnston joined Kosower to open the program with a rarity by Camille Saint-Saëns, his *La Muse et le Poète*, Op. 132. Originally written as a piano trio to memorialize one of the composer's rather too ardent admirers, its title was cooked up by the composer's publisher, Jacques Durand.

Saint-Saëns orchestrated it anyway, and title aside, it really amounts to a congenial exchange between two different musical personalities whose statements are underscored with different orchestral textures. Johnston and Kosower were engaging conversationalists, each with a distinct personality, and both stood out in clear relief against the ensemble, which was nicely controlled by Más-Arocas.



Of Haydn's two cello concertos, No. 2 in D presents the greater challenge to the soloist. Much of the solo line lies perilously high on the instrument, but that was child's play to Mark Kosower, who sang out with confident

intonation in the stratosphere, and brought a rich, colorful timbre out of his instrument when the music moved closer to earth.

Más-Arocas and Kosower set and maintained a laid-back tempo for the opening Allegro — perhaps one or two clicks too relaxed, considering the length of the movement. Ensemble was tight, and Kosower's cadenzas were imaginative. The slow movement was lullingly pastoral, the final Rondo bright and cheerful.

The intermissionless concert ended with Beethoven's Seventh Symphony — fast becoming one of the most-performed Beethoven works in Northeast Ohio. In brief remarks, Más-Arocas, most recently on the faculty of Baldwin Wallace Conservatory and now splitting his time between the Mansfield Symphony and the orchestras of Ithaca College, attributed its popularity to its unflagging rhythmic energy, then proceeded to prove that theory with a crisp, viscerally exciting reading of the work.

With only 20 strings and 16 winds, BlueWater might seem underpowered to take on such a large work, but the Orchestra produced large volumes of focused sound during tuttis, and the wind section delivered well-blended, lyrical playing elsewhere.

If anything, sections of the finale might have been just a bit too pumped-up: there was more noise than pitch at several junctures when the timpani added the final wallop to big climaxes. But the overall effect was impressive. Cleveland boasts a wonderful group of freelance musicians who make ensembles like this possible, and BlueWater deserves an extra ovation for using our local musicians so effectively.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 19, 2017.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)