

Conductor Vinay Parameswaran makes debut with Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra (Dec. 1)

by Daniel Hathaway



With echoes of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony still lingering in the corners of Severance Hall from their elder ensemble's concert on Thursday evening, the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra (COYO) made an impressive showing in works by Beethoven, Barber, and Prokofiev on Friday, December 1,

marking the debut of their new conductor Vinay Parameswaran at the beginning of their 32nd season.

Conductor and ensemble weren't at all shy about beginning their program with a big Cleveland Orchestra standard, *Leonore Overture No. 3*. Parameswaran's elegant conducting drew confident playing from the musicians. The strings sounded a bit more polished than winds and brass at this point in the season, but Charlie Jones' offstage trumpet calls were arresting and flawless.

Samuel Barber's eventful, single-movement *Symphony No. 1* also featured accomplished playing from the strings, especially the violas, cellos, and basses, who got singled out for bows at the end along with oboes, bassoons, contrabassoon, and timpani. Kate Young contributed a lovely oboe solo in the slow section, and Barber's smaller instrumental groupings contrasted nicely with tutti passages. In programming the work, Parameswaran made another connection with The Cleveland Orchestra: Artur Rodzinski led the U.S. premiere of the work in 1937.



Sergei Prokofiev extracted three suites from his ballet music for *Romeo and Juliet*. Parameswaran tailor-made his own suite of eight movements for Friday's program, featuring both well-known and not-so-often-played episodes from the original score.

COYO responded to Parameswaran's dynamic leadership with some brilliant, dramatic playing. Solo standouts included saxophonist Emily Schrembeck, clarinetist Katherine Wang, and cornettist Charlie Jones. The horn section, which had sounded a bit reticent earlier, added some colorful effects, and the trombones — especially in “The Death of Tybalt” — sounded glorious. Ending his selections with “The Death of Juliette” provided less of a climax, but Parameswaran made a canny choice in favor of preserving the storyline of the ballet.



Perusing the COYO personnel list, it's fascinating to see what a broad range of schools the Orchestra draws from, including half a dozen players who are homeschooled. And the roster runs deep as well, including two contrabassoonists and three timpanists — two of them female. Standing behind these young players are a long list of private teachers, including 25 members of The Cleveland Orchestra who take time to coach them, handing on their expertise to the orchestral musicians of the future. Here's a shout-out to all those offstage mentors who helped make Friday's onstage performances so successful.

Photos by Roger Mastroianni.

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