

**Preparing to hear a new work:
Staud's *Stromab* at Severance Hall**

by Daniel Hathaway



This weekend, music director Franz Welser-Möst and The Cleveland Orchestra will precede their Thursday and Saturday performances of Mahler's *Symphony No. 9* with the Cleveland premieres of Austrian composer Johannes Maria Staud's *Stromab*. The 15-minute work was co-commissioned by The Cleveland Orchestra, who will take it to New York's Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall on January 23. Staud was named by Welser-Möst as the Orchestra's

Daniel R. Lewis Young Composer Fellow for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 seasons.

Thanks to the resources of the internet, it's possible to do a bit of prepping to hear such a new work before taking your seat in Severance Hall — when many patrons will have their first opportunity to read the notes in the program book. Here's your opportunity to do a little homework before the downbeat.

Staud's work, which translates as "Downstream," is based on *The Willows*, a 1907 horror tale by the British author Algernon Blackwood. Staud writes,

In this short story, one of the finest horror stories of all time, two young people canoe down the Danube. They finally fetch up at high water in a floodplain on a lonely island field, apparently totally untouched by civilization. There they undergo weird things in a very confined space, things gradually threatening to increase to almost cosmic dimensions —

always accompanied by a strangely circling sound that can't be located, seemingly hovering eerily over the setting.

*My work is not program music, but is able to sense the incredible vibrations emanating from Blackwood's musically visionary prose. It also takes the image of voyaging along a great stream seriously. In *Stromab* the whole orchestra is sent in its dazzling diversity like a boat down the great river. Since, according to Blackwood, a river is a capricious, gigantic, unruly, primeval creature, there must of course also be, besides idyllic landscapes, treacherous currents and dangerous whirlpools that more than once almost capsize the boat in the raging waters before it again ultimately reaches calmer waters in the delta.*

Thanks to Project Gutenberg, you can read the whole text of Blackwood's story [here](#) in several digital formats.

Courtesy of Bärenreiter, Staud's publisher, you can have a look at the first eight and the last four pages of the composer's full orchestra [score](#) in pdf format (click on "downloads"). The pages are so large that you won't be able to see everything on a computer screen (much less your phone!), but this will give you some idea of the enormous size of Staud's orchestra and the rhythmical complexity of his writing. Notice the extremely slow tempo (quarter note = 40 per minute) and consider his almost Mahlerian performance instructions (*Von großer Ruhe und Zartheit (nicht eilen!)*), or "Of great calm and delicacy (do not rush!)"

And you can hear *Stromab* in a performance by François-Xavier Roth and the Vienna Symphony from October of 2017 on [YouTube](#).

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