

Cleveland Orchestra with Labadie and Faust (Feb. 15)

by Daniel Hathaway



Musical chameleon that it can be, The Cleveland Orchestra put itself completely in the hands of Montréal-based early music specialist Bernard Labadie and German violinist Isabelle Faust on Thursday evening, February 15, producing fresh and insightful versions of standard works by Mendelssohn and Mozart, and a tantalizing taste of the work of a little-known Parisian

composer of the Classical era.

Conducting a reduced ensemble while seated on a piano bench, Labadie began his program with a rarity, Henri-Joseph Rigel's *Symphony No. 4 in c*. A German who settled in Paris and wrote in the Italian style, Rigel was associated with the *Concert Spirituel* and became one of the founders of the Paris Conservatoire.

Thursday evening's work, one of his 14 symphonies, embodies some *Sturm und Drang* drama in its outer movements and briefly offers the respite of a *Siciliano* in the second. Labadie brought out its sudden bursts of energy and wild contrasts of dynamics to fine effect in a reading of appealing transparency. Vibrato was used only judiciously and only for expressive effect.

Isabelle Faust, Labadie, and a larger orchestra collaborated in a performance of Mendelssohn's always-ingratiating Violin Concerto remarkable for its wide dynamic range and sense of understatement. Unlike more Romantic interpreters, Faust barely raised her voice above the orchestra, while playing with commanding technique and control. Her tone was consistently lovely amid some real bursts of passion. The *presto* tempo of the final movement nearly achieved the status of the composer's scherzos.

The audience was obviously taken by the performance, calling Faust back for several bows and eventually the oddest encore played at Severance Hall in living memory: György Kurtág's brief and stark *Doloroso*.



Just when you think you know a piece pretty well, somebody like Bernard Labadie comes along and shows you what you've been missing. The conductor revealed an extraordinary number of hidden details in Mozart's *Symphony No. 40* on Thursday evening, leaving no phrase unexamined.

That approach can lead to a performance that's merely a series of interesting episodes, but while Labadie was lovingly examining the micro-aspects of Mozart's score, the macro-view was always in full sight as well.

The Cleveland Orchestra was wonderfully responsive to his take on the symphony, playing with a historically sensitive version of its characteristic mix of warmth, incisiveness, and textural clarity. A woman in

my row retook her seat after the applause, savoring what had just happened. "We have a wonderful orchestra," she said. You bet we do.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com February 21, 2018.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)