

### Arts Renaissance Tremont: Mark Kosower plays Bach

by Timothy Robson



In honor of the Baroque master's 333rd birthday on the 21st of the month, Cleveland Orchestra principal cello Mark Kosower played an all-Bach recital on Sunday, March 18 on the Arts Renaissance Tremont Series at Pilgrim Congregational Church. It was a splendid and generous concert, musically, spiritually, and temporally — and at over two and a quarter hours, there were a lot of notes!

The recital was part of Kosower's *Bach for Humanity* initiative, in which he plans to bring Bach's music to a wide cross-section of socioeconomic spheres through community outreach, educational performances, and

performances in concert halls in the greater Cleveland area. Viewing the almost full house and enthusiastic response, there is clearly an audience for his project.

Each half of the program included one cello suite and one work for solo violin arranged by Kosower. The cello suites are landmarks of the literature, but Kosower's arrangements of the violin works inspired virtuosic performances, making the cello suites seem like mere warm-up exercises. Given that all of the works were composed in 1720, the contrast between them was remarkable.

Kosower played the *Cello Suites No. 1 in G* and *No. 4 in E-flat*, both of them in six movements following the pattern of Baroque dance suites. Kosower's sound is refined, with sensitive phrasing and musical line. He is, of course, a brilliant orchestral cellist, but here he was free to express his musicality in his own way. In the first suite, the Sarabande was lyrical, not as dramatic as sometimes heard. The triple meter of the Gigue

supported a flurry of notes, but Kosower's playing was never rushed, always under control.

In spoken comments, the cellist likened the *Violin Sonata No. 3 in C* to the coming of the Lord, and prayers of thanks. Even if one ignored these ideas, the performance was effective. There were no shortcuts in the transcription. He replicated Bach's violin double stops which convey the harmonic structure of the work. The three polyphonic voices of the fugue were clear, the Largo was an elaborate aria, and the final Allegro assai was very fast, played more like Presto, showing Kosower's brilliant agility.

The Prelude of *Suite No. 4 in E-flat* was like a fantasia, its series of arpeggios interrupted at several points by scalar, cadenza-like passages. The dotted rhythms in the stately and poised Sarabande were somewhat smoothed out, and the playful Bourée continued without pause into the final joyful Gigue.

Bach's *Violin Partita No. 2 in d* stands alongside the keyboard Passacaglia, the *Mass in B Minor*, and the St. Matthew and St. John Passions as one of Bach's greatest achievements. The first four movements are in the standard dance suite pattern, and Kosower showed how much Bach could communicate in a few notes in the Sarabande. But for the last movement, Bach gives the performer a monumental Chaconne lasting as long as the other four combined.

Kosower's transcription and performance were remarkable technically and musically, although he may still have more to glean and communicate in this relentless piece. The mellow sound of the cello makes a different impression from the sharpness of the more familiar violin in this craggy music. Nonetheless, Kosower's performance was riveting.

This concert was dedicated to the memory of Robert Schneider, longtime President of the Board of Arts Renaissance Tremont, who died recently of complications from injuries suffered in an auto accident last summer while he was traveling in Europe.

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