

**Cleveland Philharmonic +
National Marionette Theatre +
Double Digit Piano Duo (Oct. 13)**

by David Kulma



The Cleveland Philharmonic put on a smilingly fun family concert on Saturday, October 13 at Cleveland State University's Waetjen Auditorium. Music Director Victor Liva was joined by multiple guests to bring off shining versions of works by Prokofiev and Saint-Saëns alongside a Grieg orchestral chestnut.

The stars of the first half were the beautiful puppets of the National Marionette Theatre in Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. While the composer designed this work to be a teaching piece about orchestral instruments, as told by a narrator in between the famous music, puppeteers David J. Syrotiak and Mariana Palade Syrotiak sculpted it into a continuous, dialogue-based play with the music as underscore.

Their mini-stage with its own effective lighting, hand-painted backdrops, and amazingly designed puppets — including the humorous, lovable duck and the insouciant, tail-flicking cat — made the whole experience immersive and magical. Prokofiev's music was still integral to the whole as Liva and the CPO ably backed up the proceedings, handling the complex yet singable music with great care.

After intermission, the CPO expanded to full orchestra for Edvard Grieg's well-worn *Peer Gynt Suite No. 1*. Clearly outlining his intentions for the musicians, Liva gave most of the movements a standard interpretation. His faster tempo for the forlorn "Ase's Death" aimed for a smooth, forward-moving statement, but was somewhat undermined

by dragging. “In the Hall of the Mountain King” suffered from standard balance problems: the winds overpowered the strings from the hushed, opening plucks all the way to the smash-bang ending.

Fronted by the excellent Double Digit Piano Duo — pianists Coren Estrin Mino and Ron Palka — the CPO returned to a smaller format for Camille Saint-Saëns’s creature-based chamber suite, *The Carnival of the Animals*. During the composer’s lifetime, this witty and at times laugh-out-loud funny music was only performed in private. But after his death, it became an educational concert standard — not only for its humor and picturesque tone painting, but for its often beautiful melodies.



Liva led an enchanting performance full of wonderful colors and musical jokes. Mino and Palka were spectacularly precise and scintillating, constantly changing musical roles throughout the suite. Sometimes they were two separate soloists, sometimes they accompanied other members of the ensemble, and sometimes they sounded like one giant piano. Principal bass Amanda Tavani and principal cello Elizabeth Zadinsky aptly captured their own musical characters — the deep-voiced elephant and the eloquent swan.

Another highlight was the “Pianists” movement, where Saint-Saëns makes fun of the everyday sounds of a conservatory — students screwing up scales and other Hanon-based horrors. Mino’s and Palka’s insertion of an exaggerated pause for a page turn added to the fun. Further underlining the joy of this musical gem: narrator Todd Christopher’s delightful readings of Ogden Nash’s purposefully silly poems that only he could write.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 22, 2018.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)