

Cleveland Orchestra with Gimeno & Kosower (Oct. 18)

by David Kulma



As autumn finally slammed Northeast Ohio with colder temperatures, the Toronto Symphony's new music director-designate Gustavo Gimeno led The Cleveland Orchestra in a stimulating and shining program for his Severance Hall debut on Friday, October 18. This concert featured an early, ecstatic overture by Samuel Barber, an Alberto Ginastera concerto

starring principal cello Mark Kosower, and a melody-drenched warhorse by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

Barber's first work for orchestra — the *Overture to "The School for Scandal,"* Op. 5 — bursts with energy, surprising surety, finesse, and vigor. Written when he was 21, it explores the comedic moods of the eponymous play by Enlightenment-era Irishman Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Barber's regular reliance on sweeping cuts to new ideas points to how his musical style was incorporated into the palette of film music: John Williams has clearly studied Barber to his benefit. Gimeno oversaw a smoothly transparent rendition that spun through the many melodies the Orchestra played with great elan.

Kosower has made Ginastera's cello music one of his signatures, as he showed in his intense and loving lead role in the composer's 1980 *Concerto No. 2*. In four movements, this concerto written for Ginastera's cellist wife, Aurora Nátola, explores what might be best described as Magical Surrealism — he called it "Neo-Expressionist." The opening

“*Metamorfosi di un tema*” told its story through texture and color, beginning in the basement with a double bass drone, some harp plucks, a little clarinet and horn, then unfolding with a wicked rising arpeggio in the solo cello.

The puckish “*Scherzo sfuggevole*” allowed Kosower, Gimeno, and the Orchestra to create a disturbing dream world reminiscent of a Tim Burton animated feature mixed with the style of Berlioz’s “Queen Mab” Scherzo. The slow “*Nottilucente*” focuses on a hushed pond soundscape with complex, soft chords and guiro-based frog calls. And the “*Cadenza e Finale rustico*” mixes Latin dance music with Ginastera’s chromatic universe (i.e. rustic seen darkly through a liquor bottle and dancing as exciting, nightmarish Bernstein). Kosower’s amazing pitch and supreme focus gave his extended cadenza a grand sweep, and Gimeno and the Orchestra brought a clear and precise hue to this fascinating concerto.



Rimsky-Korsakov’s 1888 *Scheherazade* is a concerto for orchestra in everything but name, making it the perfect showpiece for the soloistic prowess inherent in The Cleveland Orchestra. It is also a great joy for connoisseurs of beautiful musical phrasing: for 40 minutes the composer unfurls the same small set of melodies over and over in different orchestral combinations. For a successful performance, a conductor must treat it more like a Verdi opera than a Brahms symphony.

Gimeno drew great excitement and precision from the Orchestra while also giving the many soloists the room they needed. In fact, the whole orchestra shined in Rimsky-Korsakov’s celebrated orchestration. Especially the exactitude and clarity from the percussionists along the back wall.

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