

Cleveland Orchestra with Roth & Perianes (Feb. 28)

by Daniel Hathaway



Although the indisposition of violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja deprived Severance Hall audiences last weekend of hearing the concerto that Péter Eötvös wrote in honor of the Columbia astronauts, it provided Spanish pianist Javier Perianes with a second opportunity to solo in Ravel's G-Major Concerto with The Cleveland Orchestra.

Perianes' first shot at the tricky work came in July of 2016 at Blossom under Bramwell Tovey, when *ClevelandClassical's* Neil McCalmont wrote that the pianist performed "with Mozart-like clarity, pristinely matching up with the other instruments during runs." His second, indoor performance of the work on Thursday, February 28 in collaboration with French conductor François-Xavier Roth was equally impressive.

The crack of a whip at the beginning sends the piece off in a jazzy frenzy of activity that alternates with sudden passages of bluesy calm. The Orchestra's second guest conductor in a row to forgo a baton in favor of gesturing with bare hands and fingers, Roth kept the piece coolly in control without sacrificing any of its attractive edginess.

The steel-fingered Perianes dazzled in the first and last movements and beguiled in the long-winding melody of the second, gorgeously joined by English hornist Robert Walters for its reprise.

By now, The Cleveland Orchestra has played the G-Major Concerto frequently enough that the ensemble has settled comfortably into its nervous groove. They joined Perianes in a confident, exciting — and exacting — reading of the non-stop finale, crowned by Daniel McKelway's wild, keening E-flat clarinet licks.

The shortness of the playlist easily accommodated an extended encore, and Perianes had saved enough energy for a breathtaking account of de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*.

Roth began the program with Philippe Manoury's reconstruction and orchestration of a student work by Debussy, "Rêve" from *Première Suite d'Orchestre*, partial materials for which were discovered in New York's Pierpont Morgan Library just a decade ago.

It made a pleasant impression as a bookmark in the composer's career, as well as an opener for the Ravel, but the most notable feature of the brief work is its extensive use of tuba on the bass line. Debussy or Manoury? No way to tell.

The big piece on Thursday evening was the entire ballet score of Stravinsky's *Pétrouchka*, set during a St. Petersburg Shrove Tuesday fair and appropriately scheduled in Cleveland just a few days before Mardi Gras.

The ballet is built into the DNA of The Cleveland Orchestra, whose then-musicians performed it under the banner of the Musical Arts Association in March of 1916 with Diaghilev's touring Ballets Russes. Heard on Thursday in its 1947 revision by the composer, it's been in the repertoire ever since the Orchestra was created in 1918.

The magic of *Pétrouchka* is Stravinsky's ability to paint such a vast palette of colors and characters that the score can largely stand on its own without staging and dancers. As the tragedy of the love triangle between the half-puppet, half-human *Pétrouchka*, the Ballerina, and the Moor unfolded in scenes introduced by drum rolls, Roth drew stunningly evocative playing out of the Orchestra. A number of individuals contributed splendidly to the narrative — pianist Carolyn Gadiel Warner, trumpeters Michael Sachs and Jack Sutte, and English hornist Robert Walters, to name a few — with garlands of keyboard chords, clashing fanfares, and a lame-footed dance tune, respectively. While the story doesn't end well for the title character, it was a wall-to-wall delight for the audience, who gave Roth and the Orchestra a noisy ovation.

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