

## Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra & Cleveland Orchestra Youth Chorus (Mar. 3)

by David Kulma



One of the great joys of teenage ensembles is the sheer vivacity and palpable excitement of the musicians, especially when they get to sink their teeth into important repertoire. This was in full view during this year's

joint Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra and Cleveland Orchestra Youth Chorus concert on Sunday, March 3 at Severance Hall under COYO music director Vinay Parameswaran.

Before the concert itself, I caught the end of the Prelude that began an hour before in Reinberger Chamber Music Hall. After a robust reading of the first movement of Dvorak's "American" Quartet, COYC assistant director Adam Landry led the chorus's Chamber Ensemble in two numbers. The young men and women sounded best in Daniel Gawthrop's *Sing Me to Heaven*, giving its calm discords and tantalizing melodies a taut power. Thomas Morley's madrigal *Fire, Fire, My Heart* was successfully managed, if less exciting.

The main event started with a vigorous performance of a youth orchestra standard: Brahms's *Tragic Overture*, Op. 81. Parameswaran and COYO brought out its hefty sadness and thick textures with clarity and fine balance. The players were up to the task of the composer's tricky style and complex rhythmic techniques, especially his broad and brusque tutti sections.

In a daring choice that would challenge good college orchestras, Parameswaran programmed Debussy's "*Ibéria*" from his triptych *Images*. It's full of complex wind solos, diaphanous textures, and vigorous dance rhythms, and COYO ably managed the intricacies of this difficult music that changes speed and halts on a dime. The fast

movements were understandably under tempo, but Parameswaran and COYO gave a loving rendition that maintained the ecstatic vitality of the music. The next skill for these musicians to gain is the exquisite phrasing required to really bring off Debussy's immaculate melodies.



COYC — wonderfully prepared by director Daniel Singer — joined COYO and Parameswaran in two works on the second half. Joseph Haydn's jovial *Te Deum for the Empress Maria Therese* featured excellent, largely homophonic singing from the choir. They handled the complex melismas of the "In te, Domine, speravi" fugue with care, while the orchestra deftly accompanied them in Classical style and brought some helpful darkness when called for.

The treat of the concert was Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Five Mystical Songs*, featuring professional baritone soloist Alexander Elliott. Elliott has a regal tone that brought the necessary weight and stateliness required for Vaughan Williams's settings of poetry by George Herbert. The choir was precise and powerful in its interjections, while the orchestra successfully spun out the beautiful textures and soundscapes the composer is well known for. Directors, coaches, teachers, parents, and especially the members of COYO and COYC should be pleased with their performances during this musically elaborate evening.

*Photo by Roger Mastroianni.*

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