

CityMusic Cleveland with Amit Peled & Mélisse Brunet in Lakewood (May 17)

by David Kulma



CityMusic Cleveland closed out its 15th season with five concerts in worship spaces across the Cleveland area the third week in May. The enjoyable and excellently curated program, “Hidden Gems,” was led by Mélisse Brunet and featured cellist Amit Peled. I heard the Friday, May 17 performance at Lakewood Congregational Church.

Born in France and based in North Carolina, Brunet is a skilled and polished conductor

with an excellent pedigree including conducting degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music, the University of Michigan, and the Paris Conservatory. Luckily, she has an interest in bringing less heard, deserving music to her audience’s ears. Brunet led the orchestra with panache and clarity, giving inspiring and assured renditions of each work. She also spoke knowledgeably from the podium, providing helpful information and insights.

Fanny Hensel, the equally talented sister of Felix Mendelssohn, wrote only one orchestral work, around 1830. Like her brother, Hensel was an exquisite craftsman, and this *Overture in C* showed off her wonderful command of early Romantic style. Brunet and CityMusic gave a cohesive and well-shaped reading of this delightful overture in the mostly pleasant acoustic of Lakewood Congregational.

Israeli-born and Baltimore-based cellist Amit Peled brought eloquent power and immense focus to Saint-Saëns’s *Cello Concerto No. 1*. Speaking from the stage, Peled

noted that this bracing concerto appeared at a time when cellists weren't soloists. And once Brunet gave the downbeat, Peled immediately shifted into high drama and held my rapt attention through this familiar work. His flowing rubato gave the music necessary weight, and Brunet and CityMusic ably kept up with the epic fancies of this continuous virtuoso showpiece. Unfortunately, the acoustic gave the middle-movement theme an uncharacteristic harshness.



It was an exciting treat to hear Saint-Saëns's little-heard *Symphony No. 2*. This delightful 4-movement, 25-minute work showed off the 25-year-old composer's Beethovenian skill. Brunet and CityMusic gave the minor-key opening movement a sturdy, forward motion, while the vigorous scherzo and major-key finale — a tarantella — exploded with energy. The finale includes a reminder of the tuneful second movement with its English horn solo brought to plangent life by Justine Myers. This convincing performance led one to wonder why this worthwhile piece is so obscure.

Kodály's zesty and rhythmically effervescent *Dances of Galánta* ended the program. Clarinetist Ellen Breakfield Glick handled the nearly concerto-like solos with skill and poise, and the rest of the orchestra successfully managed the breakneck speeds asked for by the composer and the conductor. Some soft dynamics were too loud, but Brunet and company delivered an exciting and fun rendition of music by another composer whose music should be heard more often.

Photos from other performances of this concert cycle.

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