

Cleveland Orchestra: Gerstein plays new Adès Concerto (Oct. 11)

by Daniel Hathaway



Pianist Kirill Gerstein brought the resplendent new concerto that Thomas Adès has written for him to Severance Hall on October 11. Debuted by the Boston Symphony earlier this year when it was led by Adès himself, the simply titled *Piano Concerto* formed the torso of a topsy-turvy Cleveland Orchestra program

guest conducted by Alan Gilbert that began with a symphony, and ended with an overture.

In 25 eventful minutes, Adès creates a sendup of the Romantic piano concerto, clothing a traditional body in the latest fashion. Pianist and listeners can revel in plenty of familiar, virtuosic gestures, but Adès provides the orchestra with a huge palette of alluring hues, creating a primordial soup out of which evanescent melodic fragments emerge. Those that don't develop further hint at familiar tunes — haven't we heard this piece before somewhere?

The joyous, syncopated first movement (*Allegramente*), woozy, jazzy, and often lyrical in an off-kilter way, toys with march-like elements. The second (*Andante gravemente*) is hauntingly sad. The orchestra complicates things by introducing notes that interfere with the piano themes, then leaves the soloist alone at the end. A riot of piano scales, mallets, and piccolo sets the third (*Andante giojoso*) in motion.

Described in the composer's notes as a "call-to-arms," the finale contains "a good deal of argument, with frequent differences of opinion as regards key." Eventful? Adès goes on to write that the movement ends in "a precipice which the piano falls off with the original tumbling theme, and a coda lining up all the other themes for a final resolution on the call-to-arms."

Gerstein, Gilbert, and The Cleveland Orchestra delivered Adès' dramatic scenario with fervor and remarkable textural transparency. There were really too many details to process in a single hearing, but the audience was transported, rewarding the performance with a big ovation.

The first half of the program comprised Gilbert's highly-romanticized reading of Brahms' most unassuming symphony, No. 3 in e. At the other end of the evening — and the stylistic spectrum — came a lean, clean performance of J.S. Bach's Third Orchestral Suite by a reduced orchestra, necessitating a nearly complete stage reset after the piano concerto.

The Bach was delightful. Gilbert kept a firm hand on the tiller throughout the journey, and the musicians, who performed standing, responded with a historically-savvy performance on modern instruments. Concertmaster Peter Otto contributed flawless solos, and trumpeters Michael Sachs, Jack Sutte, and Michael Miller played with subtle grandeur, only occasionally overbalancing the orchestra — through no fault of their own.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 22, 2019.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)