

Cleveland Orchestra Community Concert at Lakewood Civic Auditorium (Feb. 16)

by Timothy Robson



On Sunday afternoon, February 16, The Cleveland Orchestra accomplished the seemingly impossible feat of performing two concerts simultaneously at different parts of the Cleveland metropolis. One was the final performance of this week's subscription concert, the other a free community concert at Lakewood Civic Auditorium.

Having never attended any of the orchestra's community concerts, I chose the latter. The concert, lasting slightly more than an hour, was presented as part of The Cleveland Orchestra's Neighborhood Partners program. It turned out to be an enjoyable experience, rapturously received by the capacity crowd — including people of all ages, from toddlers to senior citizens — who started lining up more than an hour before curtain time.

Although the tickets were free, it was general admission, so early arrival assured a better seat. While waiting in line, I heard several people say that they normally can't afford tickets at Severance Hall, but they were eager to hear The Cleveland Orchestra.

Lakewood Civic Auditorium is not Severance Hall in physical beauty, amenities, or acoustic, but it served its purpose. There were a few oddities of balance, but the music came through.

The concert opened with a double string quartet performance by four members of The Cleveland Orchestra sitting alongside four students from Lakewood High School, playing a movement from Sibelius's *Intimate Voices*, Op. 56. The students had been coached by the orchestra players, and the ensemble gave a creditable performance.



The rest of the program was devoted to excerpts of symphonic works by Beethoven, plus part of Haydn's *Symphony No. 96* ("The Miracle"). The concert was conducted by Cleveland Orchestra assistant conductor Vinay Parameswaran, who tag-teamed with narrator Donald Carrier in concise commentary. Carrier gave historical and social context to the music as it related to Beethoven's life, while Parameswaran pointed out musical aspects of the excerpts.

There were the usual Beethoven hits, starting with part of the first movement from the Fifth Symphony, with its famous four-note opening. Haydn was Beethoven's teacher, so the orchestra demonstrated the contrast between Haydn's elegant classicism and Beethoven's much more personal musical statements.

They continued with the joyous fourth movement of the Second Symphony, composed just as Beethoven was beginning to lose his hearing — an ongoing theme of the commentary. The narration emphasized the importance of class hierarchy in early 19th-century Vienna: Beethoven would never be an aristocrat, no matter how acclaimed his music.

Of the four overtures Beethoven wrote for his 1804 opera *Leonore* — later renamed *Fidelio* — only No. 3 has gained popularity in the concert hall. Parameswaran led an excerpt beginning with its off-stage trumpet fanfares.

The *Symphony No. 7* was represented by a short segment of the second movement, a set of variations. The *Große Fuge*, extracted from the composer's Op. 133 String Quartet, was put into the context of Beethoven's struggle to communicate his radical inner musical thoughts. The orchestra sampled enough of its sharply dotted themes to give a general idea of the piece.



To close the program, Parameswaran and The Cleveland Orchestra played the first statement of the famous “Ode to Joy” finale of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*.

As a member of the Boomer generation, I grew up watching Leonard Bernstein’s Young People’s Concerts with the New York Philharmonic on TV. They were an important part of my early musical experiences, especially growing up on a farm in Iowa, without a ready opportunity for live music.

Hopefully these Cleveland Orchestra concerts, with both commentary and focused musical excerpts, will inspire kids in Sunday’s audience to explore more classical music. Two children, perhaps about four or five years old, sitting next to me with their parents, listened intently.

Photos by Alex Belisle, courtesy of The Cleveland Orchestra.

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