

CD Review —
The Cleveland Orchestra:
A New Century, Vol. 3

by Jarrett Hoffman



A shared sense of the epic ties together the final two works of *A New Century*, the three-part live album from Franz Welser-Möst and The Cleveland Orchestra that is also the ensemble's inaugural release on its own record label.

We begin with the world premiere recording of *Okeanos*, Bernd Richard Deutsch's concerto for organ and orchestra, featuring Paul Jacobs as soloist. The title refers not only to the Titan of Greek mythology, but also “to an idea of immense (and sometimes unfathomable) greatness and breadth, which conjures up in my

mind the thought of the organ,” as Deutsch writes in his [notes](#). But vastness doesn't only apply to the volume and capabilities of the organ. *Okeanos* also requires a large orchestra full of uncommon finds in the percussion section and an arsenal of auxiliary wind instruments.

With its many stops imitating the sounds of the orchestra, an organ is equipped to take on a unique role in a concerto: that of alter ego or evil twin. Here Deutsch asks these two colossal figures — solo instrument and ensemble — to converse or battle it out at times, but even more so to wrap their limbs around each other, intertwining in sound.

Each movement is named after one of the four ancient elements: *Wasser*, *Luft*, *Erde*, and *Feuer*. “Water” reveals some of the most fascinating, kaleidoscopic combinations of timbre, while “Earth” is perhaps the most powerful, both sonically and emotionally. Deutsch turns up the knob on atmosphere and suspense, and alternates between god-like wrath and wonder.

“Air” is tongue in cheek and fleet of foot, beginning with an organ solo that’s both impressively virtuosic and full of humor. Later, Jacobs seems to light a fuse, kicking off a frantic sequence of events across the orchestra that leads into the rhythmically insistent, exciting, yet ultimately somewhat superficial finale, “Fire.” Throughout the concerto, from the thrilling technique and airtight ensemble to the level of musicality that puts all the chips on the table, you couldn’t ask for more from Jacobs, Welser-Möst, the many orchestral soloists, and The Cleveland Orchestra as a whole.

An imposing sense of scale and drama carries over to Prokofiev’s Third Symphony. That makes sense given the source material: the composer drew on music from his opera *The Fiery Angel* (finally premiered in 1954, a year after his death), a tragedy of love, betrayal, and the supernatural.

A weighty feeling of power and terror is the baseline to which the music always returns — in the first movement, the strings stand out for their deep, urgent emotion, as though they’re truly in the throes of something dire. And even as different moods crop up, darkness is never far away. Perhaps it’s just being swept hopefully under the rug as in the second movement, which seems to be trying it’s best to put on a brave, cheerful face.

This may not be the most memorable of Prokofiev’s symphonies, but by the time we meet the unmistakable fate and punishment of the finale, it’s surely a compelling journey brought to life gracefully, sneeringly, and full of nuance by Welser-Möst and the Orchestra.

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