

Cleveland Orchestra: Episode 3 of “In Focus”

by Mike Telin



“We have Severance Hall and we have Blossom Music Center, and Adella feels like our third home — a digital home for the 21st century,” Cleveland Orchestra chief brand officer Ross Binnie said during a recent telephone conversation.

On Thursday, November 12 at 7:00 pm, The Cleveland Orchestra will present “In Focus: Episode 3.” Recorded at Severance on the 22nd and 23rd of October under the direction of Franz Welser-Möst, the program features Haydn’s *Piano Concerto in D* with Emanuel Ax as soloist, and Bartók’s *Divertimento for Strings*. Click [here](#) to access the Orchestra’s Adella streaming platform (available on demand following the

premiere), and [here](#) to purchase Adella premium.

Although behind-the-scenes discussions had centered around the creation of digital concerts for some time, Binnie noted that “like our ‘On a Personal Note’ podcasts, creating ‘In Focus’ was accelerated because of the pandemic.”

While acknowledging that they are not the only orchestra to offer their own digital platform, Binnie does see Cleveland’s as being a little different from the others. “We’re all trying to tell our stories, but I think ours is more focused on our music-making than our history, although there is a part of the site that’s devoted to archives.”

Ultimately, when audiences cannot attend in-person performances, Adella provides a way for the Orchestra to stay in touch with their donors, subscribers, and single-ticket buyers. “We typically play to 400,000 people in a year, and Adella helps us transport our

story across the world. It helps us keep in touch: it's great for our audiences in Miami, it's great for our audiences in Europe and Asia — they can see what we're doing the rest of the year, which I think is a tremendous asset.”

Who is watching and how are they watching? “The first hour of the first ‘In Focus’ show, we had 700 people logged on and ready to go,” Binnie said. “That was just on the website, and there were a lot more than that on the app.”



Figuring out the logistics of producing a pre-recorded show has come with a steep learning curve. “We’re blessed to be partnering with ideastream and we’ve got a lighting partner, but the speed with which we are turning the shows around — we’re recording them about a week before they go up — requires an enormous effort on the people who are editing. We’re trying to make this as true to a Cleveland Orchestra experience as we can. It’s not a pre-produced Hollywood film that we’re trying to bring to people in their living rooms, it is much more

of a concert. Also, we now need to pay attention to things that we never have before. For example, what do we do with the time between movements? That has been a topic of discussion because we can’t have 30 seconds of fidgeting. All these odd little things are fascinating and fun challenges.”

During the creation process, subscriber focus groups were also brought into the discussion. “They all said they can’t wait to come back to Severance. They also intimated that a show lasting somewhere around an hour was the limit — there is definitely a screen fatigue factor.”

Although no one on the staff had producing a show like “In Focus” listed in their job description six months ago, Binnie said, “I am delighted with the start that we have made, and I do think this digital concert hall is here to stay. The genie is out of the bottle as they say.”

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