

## Cleveland Orchestra: *In Focus* 10 harks back to 19th century format

by Daniel Hathaway



Before orchestras settled on the time-honored program formula of overture, concerto, and symphony — which many still observe — musical evenings were more varied and could include solo songs, piano pieces, and chamber music, in addition to orchestral works.

In the tenth episode of *In Focus*, The Cleveland Orchestra has revived that tradition on a small scale,

programming an arrangement for oboe and piano of a Ravel solo piano piece and following it by a set of variations for string orchestra — a lovely combination of varied works that makes a satisfying, one-hour program.

Principal oboe Frank Rosenwein joins pianist Carolyn Warner, who usually operates from the second violin section, for an expressive performance of David Walter's reworking of Maurice Ravel's piano *Sonatine*, a piece Ravel originally submitted anonymously for a magazine competition.

Walter, who was appointed to the oboe and chamber music faculty of the Paris Conservatory at the unheard-of age of 29, has taught at London's Guildhall School since 1997 and has more than 230 arrangements to his credit. He knows what he's doing, and the new *Sonatine* sounds as though it was originally intended for the oboe.

Much of it lies high in the instrument's register, but that's no problem for Rosenwein, whose tone blooms even in the stratosphere, and whose intonation in the upper reaches remains flawless.



Frank Bridge was Benjamin Britten's first teacher, and made strong and lasting impressions on the young composer, who started writing a piece in his mentor's honor early on, but abandoned it in favor of other projects. He leapt at the opportunity to take up a tribute piece again when Boyd Neel was invited in May of 1937 to bring his string orchestra to the Salzburg Festival to premiere a British work. He turned to the 24-year-old Britten, who sketched out his *Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge* in ten days flat and completed the work in time for its first performance in July.

Each of the ten variations on a theme from the second of Bridge's *Three Idylls* embodies an important personal trait, and additionally, Britten incorporated parodies of various musical forms like the Viennese Waltz and the Funeral March into his piece. In its easy handling of musical materials, it will remind the listener of Britten's "Purcell Variations," a.k.a. *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* — it even ends with a fugue that nobly restates Bridge's theme in the same way that Britten recapitulates Purcell's.

Associate conductor Vinay Parameswaren leads a vibrant performance that invites The Cleveland Orchestra strings to sing in many colors and play with remarkable precision although spread out all over the Severance Hall stage.



Once again, audio and video production values are superb, although quick and frequent switching between cameras can make the viewer a bit nervous. And for some reason, the color temperature changes when one of the cameras pans out for wide shots.

*Photos by Roger Mastroianni courtesy of The Cleveland Orchestra.*

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