

## Kent Blossom Music Festival: Final Faculty Concert (July 28)

by Cait Winston



In his remarks before the July 28 Kent Blossom Music Festival concert, featuring members of The Cleveland Orchestra, Kent State University president Todd Diacon noted that while the past year has not been easy, “It has been made easier by the arts.” This statement was ratified by the performances that followed, where the freedom and passion in the musicians’ playing created a restorative sense of joy and optimism.

The evening began with the Handel/Halvorsen *Passacaglia*, performed by cellist Richard Weiss and violinist Yun-Ting Lee. Throughout, the musicians maintained the graceful playfulness of the fast-paced, energetic piece, using expertly shaped phrases to create a clear narrative.

Weiss and Lee engaged in an intriguing, intricate dialogue, passing lively melodies back and forth and responding to each other’s shifts in dynamics and emphasis. Completely in sync, they traveled through highly virtuosic material, making the final cadence satisfyingly triumphant.

Though she normally serves as principal keyboard of The Cleveland Orchestra, Joela Jones took up the accordion as she joined Weiss, Lee, and bassist Maximilian Dimoff in an arrangement of “Nessun Dorma” from Puccini’s *Turandot*.

The accordion’s bright, forward tone added a layer of brilliance to the rich hues of the other instruments, creating a unique collective sound. At other times, its timbre became surprisingly tender and gentle, appropriate for the emotional material. Weiss and Lee handled the melodies beautifully, soaring over the foundation laid by Jones and Dimoff and playing with subtle but impactful gestures such as slight *ritardandos* before climactic moments.

Puccini was followed by Mátyás Seiber’s *Introduction and Allegro* for cello and accordion. Once again, the accordion added a new depth to the cello’s full-bodied timbre, as the music shifted from light, atmospheric melodies to more dissonant, urgent material.

In three pieces by Morricone, Weiss and Jones took the audience on a storytelling journey that began in a place of intensity and longing in *Cinema Paradiso*, where Weiss’s tactful use of vibrato helped to emphasize moments of high drama. Moving to *Gabriel’s Oboe* from the more hopeful material of *The Mission*, the duo finally found closure in music that conveyed triumph and satisfaction.

The quartet came back together for four pieces by Piazzolla. In *Milonga del Angel*, Dimoff’s bass sound was subtle but very effective in driving the piece forward with tango rhythms, as the other instruments set down layers of rich harmonics. In *Tanti Anni Prima*, the collective sound was low and full, complete with indulgent glissandos on the cello. After the complex, dissonant *Oblivion*, the quartet concluded with the dynamic, decadent *Libertango*.

The concert ended with Mozart’s *Wind Serenade in c*, bringing together the octet of oboists Jeffery Rathbun and Corbin Stair, clarinetists Daniel McKelway and Robert Woolfrey, bassoonists Barrick Stees and Gareth Thomas, and hornists Michael Mayhew and Alan DeMattia.

In the Allegro and the Andante, the ensemble’s sound featured graceful and effortless melodies, lively counterpoint with a consistent momentum, and phrases that began gently, with a warm tone. In the Menuetto, the individual melodies were strong and clear, making for a delightfully intricate canon filled with rich harmonies. Without a hint of friction, the final movement moved from anxious intensity to sweetness, ending on an exuberant cadence.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com August 4, 2021.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)