

## Cleveland Orchestra plays Dvořák, Mozart, and Deutsch (Jan. 13)

by Peter Feher



On paper, last week's Cleveland Orchestra concerts might have lacked a little color: two numbered symphonies and a piece of new music with an abstract title. But Thursday's performance at Severance Music Center under the direction of Franz Welser-Möst came to vibrant life, thanks in part to the sparkling world premiere at the program's center.

*Intensity*, by Bernd Richard

Deutsch, made the most instrumental demands of the evening, and with good reason. Deutsch, the Orchestra's Daniel R. Lewis Young Composer Fellow, wrote the piece expressly for the Cleveland musicians, a follow-up to his first premiere with the ensemble, the powerful organ concerto *Okeanos* (2019).

The new work is organized in three sections, each marked off by plunky trumpet notes. But listeners might find themselves more drawn to isolated details in trying to make sense of these twenty minutes of action-packed music.

Practically every musician gets a solo line in the swarm of the opening section, including a moment for the first four players in the second violins, each on his or her own part. The full orchestra comes together in a crescendo at the piece's emotional center, only to cut away to a single, expressive note held by concertmaster Peter Otto. The gesture is repeated at the work's very end, this time with trumpets and tubular bells still ringing out after everything else has dropped away.

The idea is to keep the intensity level up, even as the music passes from ensemble to individuals. The composer's shortcut for this is the percussion section, which not only drives the piece rhythmically but gives it much of its character. The Orchestra's

percussionists were up for the challenge of a seemingly endless array of instruments, from drums to gongs to slide whistles, adding a multitude of colors while remaining united in musical purpose.



That sheer variety of sounds rubbed off on the program's second half, occupied by Dvořák's *Symphony No. 8*. In the Adagio, the flutes and oboes made interjections resembling a barrel organ, and the reeds and low strings began the fourth movement's middle section with all the menace of a war march.

The general mood of Welser-Möst's interpretation was tempestuous, suited to the Symphony's more dramatic moments. He pushed the first movement closer to its Allegro con brio marking than tradition would take it, and he kept the accompaniment agitated throughout the third movement, even in its delicate Trio section. The terraced tempo indications at the beginning of the final movement — ratcheting up a couple of clicks at a time — started quick and only got quicker, almost catching the ensemble off guard.

The Orchestra was in top form for the lightning-fast Presto of the concert's opener, Mozart's *Symphony No. 36* ("Linz"). Here, speed was a character, just one of many that Mozart captured in an instrumental work that's surprisingly operatic. The first movement, from Adagio to Allegro spiritoso, unfolded with the spirit of a cabaletta, and the first violins played a starring role throughout, from bravura trills and turns to grace notes like chortles. It made for a colorful start to the evening.

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

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com January 19, 2022.*

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