

## Dames Jane Glover and Imogen Cooper bring eloquence and elegance to Severance (Mar. 27)

by Daniel Hathaway



Half Mozart and half British, the repertory at Severance Music Center on Sunday afternoon, March 27 gave The Cleveland Orchestra multiple opportunities to shine under the baton of Dame Jane Glover, who organized the proceedings with a keen sense of style and narrative. And Dame Imogen Cooper, her compatriot in the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, crafted a

memorable account of Mozart's richly symphonic *Piano Concerto No. 22*

The geography of the event was established immediately with Benjamin Britten's *Suite on English Folk Tunes*, a collection of five pieces completed in 1974, two years before the composer's death. With folksy titles like "The Bitter Withy" and "Hankin Booby" (the latter commissioned for the 1967 opening of the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London), you expect rustic charm, which Britten delivers along with his own *batterie* of compositional devices and orchestral effects.



The concerto, which completed the first half of the concert, is a work of great substance, many structural surprises (the sudden injection of a slow movement where



you'd least expect it), and a concluding rondo on so catchy but simplistic a theme that you might grow tired of returning to it once again — if it weren't so cannily treated.

Cooper's interpretation visited a wide range of colors, textures, and articulations. She and Glover made a splendid impression that will long be remembered.

One of the great English works of the 20th century opened the second half: Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*. Based on a psalm tune the composer turned up while keeping an ear out for suitable hymn melodies as editor of the *English Hymnal* of 1906, the work masterfully deploys two string orchestras of different sizes and a solo string quartet in ringing changes on Tallis' *Third Mode Melody*.

Glover magically transformed the acoustic of Mandel Concert Hall into that of a virtual cathedral (the work was premiered at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester Cathedral in 1910), producing a thoroughly spiritual performance with an authentic British aura — something that can be elusive in the hands of non-native conductors.

The smaller orchestra, strung along the back of the stage, made a lovely contrast with the larger ensemble in which the solo quartet was embedded.



Principal viola Wesley

Collins, concertmaster Peter Otto, and principal cello Mark Kosower introduced the voices of the fugue in the middle of the *Fantasia* with free-sounding expressiveness.

Why didn't Mozart write a minuet in the "Prague" Symphony? Just curious, for it really isn't missed in the three-movement work that closed Sunday's program. Glover jettisoned her score to lead a stunningly festive performance.

This was the fourth concert in as many days, but the Orchestra played with a buoyant freshness. It was fun to see players moving up in their sections this afternoon — the oboe department being manned by Corbin Stair and Robert Walters, who sounded terrific. In fact, everybody sounded terrific this afternoon, a fact that didn't escape the large audience, who were ebullient in their ovation.

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

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