

Daniel Emmet sparkles in the spotlight at Cleveland Pops (Nov. 5)

by Stephanie Manning



Given the venues that Daniel Emmet is used to performing in, Severance Music Center must have felt like quite the culture shock. The classical crossover vocalist, a 2018 finalist on *America's Got Talent*, has entertained crowds at places like Caesars Palace, Staples Center, and Angels Stadium. But that didn't mean that Emmet was any less excited for his appearance on November 5 — quite the contrary.

"Hello, Cleveland!" he announced with a wide grin. "I've been waiting many years to say that."

Together with the Cleveland Pops Orchestra, the operatically-trained tenor delivered a memorable, genre-crossing evening of music.

With his rich tone, wide range, and contemporary edge, Emmet has often been likened to Josh Groban, and the comparison is spot-on. And before you ask: yes, he sang *Nessun dorma*. The straightforward, unamplified performance was by no means bad, but its relative unmemorability spoke more to Emmet's strength in other genres. When the mic was in his hand, the vocalist showcased a flexibility that extends far beyond Simon Cowell's moniker of "opera boy."

Emmet knows how to charm an audience — a skill no doubt developed in places like Las Vegas, where he now lives. His smile and his funny quips certainly endeared him to the packed Mandel Concert Hall. Still, he kept the performance moving, covering all kinds of genres in a little under two hours. Highlights included the extra-dramatic *Can't Help Falling in Love*, the rich, rounded sound of *You're the Inspiration*, and the sparkling *Che Vuole Questa Musica Stasera*.

Supporting Emmet were musicians from the Pops, conducted by Carl Topilow. Seeing Emmet's choice of outfit, Topilow couldn't resist pulling back his purple suit jacket to reveal the interior pattern. "He's got the glitter," he said, motioning to Emmet's black sparkly suit, "but I've got the lining!" This was true in more ways than one. While the

spotlight remained firmly on the singer, Topilow skillfully reacted to the needs of his soloist. The only real bumps in the road occurred towards the beginning, with said soloist's unpredictable rubato during "Never Enough" from *The Greatest Showman*.

Big, belting finales are Emmet's trademark — along with an impressively clear falsetto, perfectly controlled during "Writing's on the Wall" from *Spectre*. Other songs, however, proved a welcome change from the formula. *When I Fall in Love* was beautifully soulful without being flashy, while Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* featured his softest singing during a melancholy interlude with piano. And the most fun song of the evening was easily *Georgia On My Mind*, where at one point Topilow whipped out his clarinet for a groovy extended solo.

Instrumental solos were few and far between in most of the other arrangements, a missed opportunity given the quality of the orchestra. However, the ensemble got a few chances to show off their skills in four spirited interludes: an Irving Berlin medley, "Mambo" from *West Side Story*, selections from *Les Misérables*, and an arrangement from Act II of Puccini's *Turandot*.

Of all the styles Emmet covered, musical theater stood above the rest, and the second half featured a stirring rendition of "Bring Him Home" from *Les Mis*. Though some words could have been more enunciated, his genuinely emotional performance deserved its standing ovation.

This strength is reminiscent (yet again) of Josh Groban, whose Broadway debut in *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812* earned him a Tony Award. Emmet is no Jean Valjean, but perhaps with more acting training, a stint as Marius could be a real possibility. If Nick Jonas could do it, Daniel Emmet certainly can.

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