

## The Cleveland Orchestra: Berg and Schubert intertwined (Jan. 13)

by Stephanie Manning



Perhaps Franz Schubert's *Symphony No. 8* is more complete than its "Unfinished" moniker implies. After all, the composer wrote and orchestrated two full movements, creating a kind of standalone half-symphony. But Severance Music Center audiences heard this work in a new way on January 13, when The Cleveland Orchestra and Franz Welser-Möst interlaced Schubert's two memorable

movements with an unexpected partner: Alban Berg's *Three Pieces from Lyric Suite*.

The strings-only work by Berg has made relatively frequent appearances on the Orchestra's programs. In 2021, the musicians recorded it for the *In Focus* series, and it appeared again on last year's European tour. Friday's rendition maintained the group's characteristic light and effortless playing, each section blending as much as possible to echo the work's original form as a string quartet. At fifteen minutes total, the piece is quite short, but the dense encoded musical meanings require some extra-attentive listening. Splitting up the three movements ensured that each one could be appreciated on its own.

That's not to say that the combination of these two pieces was entirely effective. While the transition between Schubert's "Andante con moto" into the final movement of the Berg felt believable, some of the others created a kind of tonal whiplash. While Berg expresses romantic love through layers of musical codes and motifs, Schubert's romanticism is more stylistic, with singable melodies that are either familiar or will become so by the end. Following up the lush "Allegro moderato" — where the ensemble combined beautifully quiet playing and dramatic flair — with the minimalistic pizzicatos

of Berg's "Allegro misterioso" felt jarring. Having said that, it would be great to see this kind of experimentation again in the future.

The symphony was definitely the standout of the two pieces, with tasteful phrasing, playful clarinet and oboe solos, and an ending complete with an impeccably tuned and balanced chord. Welser-Möst kept things moving, and the 40 minutes of the first half went by quickly.

The orchestra continued their exploration of Schubert with his *Mass No. 6*, which Welser-Möst has been eagerly awaiting since the group's previous performance in 2019. Grand and symphonic, the work is far from what one would expect to hear in a church setting. The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus — thoroughly prepared by Lisa Wong — sang almost constantly throughout the 50-minute work, skillfully integrating themselves with the orchestra, insistently pleading for mercy in the Gloria, and bringing an exhilarating ferocity to the Sanctus.

Though the five vocal soloists don't have much to sing, their contributions were impactful. Soprano Joëlle Harvey and tenors Julian Prégardien and Martin Mitterutzner joined forces for the lovely rendition of "Et incantus est" from the Credo. In the Benedictus, Harvey and Prégardien formed a quartet with bass-baritone Dashon Burton and mezzo-soprano Daryl Freedman — who sported both a luscious tone and a number of sunny smiles. No doubt she will be beaming at the audience again when the Orchestra repeats this program at Carnegie Hall on January 18.

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

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