

Cleveland Orchestra: vivid *Pictures* & more under Welser-Möst (March 3)

by Daniel Hathaway



If these fingers were crafting a marketing piece for The Cleveland Orchestra’s concerts on the weekend of March 2 rather than a review, they might be tempted to entice readers to attend with such alliterative flights of prose as “Sizzling Sonic Spectacular — and more.” But in retrospect, the Orchestra’s performance of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* was just that.

The huge orchestra that filled the Mandel stage after intermission on Sunday played the closing pages of Maurice Ravel’s brilliant orchestration of the original solo piano score with spacious grandeur, the kind of treatment “The Great Gate of Kiev” deserves in these perilous times.

Franz Welser-Möst led the audience through the gallery of Victor Hartmann's idiosyncratic art like a skilled docent, pointing up interesting details and drawing precise playing from his orchestral colleagues. Among the standouts: Gabriel Piqué's finely blended alto saxophone solo in "The Old Castle," Richard Stout's liquescent tenor tuba solo in "Bydlo," and Michael Sachs' persistent trumpet nattering in "Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle." "The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba Yaga)" gained malevolent intensity from a deliberate tempo.



Mid-concert came the Ravel G-major Piano Concerto with the impressive Icelandic soloist Víkingur Ólafsson at the keyboard. The general rule with this jazz-saturated work is: if everything goes well during the first two minutes after the whip cracks, the rest of the piece will fall into place. And so it did on Friday evening. A laid-back approach took nothing away from the excitement of the piece.

That relaxed feeling persisted into the wonderfully unhurried pace of the second movement with its long, winding, expressive theme. Established by the pianist, English horn (Robert Walters) takes it up, around which the strings add a halo of twittering figures. Finally, the English horn returns to bring the searching movement to temporary closure.

Though the last movement is something of a rush to the finish line goaded on by the rude chattering of the E-flat clarinet (Daniel McKelway), Welser-Möst, Ólafsson, and the

Orchestra kept their cool (including the bassoons in that frantic passage that comes out of nowhere) right up to the end.

The program began with a rarity: Louise Farrenc's *Symphony No. 3*, in which a work that could have been sketched out by her contemporary, Felix Mendelssohn, takes on Gallic qualities. Well-crafted and beautifully played, the piece gives almost equal musical material to the strings and winds. It was fun to hear, and though it made no deep impression, it did give clarinetist Robert Woolfrey an opportunity to shine on the principal part, and he ran with it.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com March 8, 2023.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)