

The Cleveland Orchestra: Five Questions for Leif Ove Andsnes

by Mike Telin



This weekend, The Cleveland Orchestra welcomes the return of Michael Tilson Thomas to the Severance Music Center podium to lead a program that includes Debussy's *Jeux* ("Games") and Mahler's *Symphony No. 1* ("Titan"). The concerts, presented on Thursday at 7:30 pm, Saturday at 8:00 pm, and Sunday at 3:00 pm, will also include Debussy's *Fantaisie for Piano and Orchestra* with Leif Ove Andsnes as soloist.

Andsnes has been a Cleveland audience favorite since making his debut at Blossom in 1990, and although his schedule didn't permit a telephone interview, the pianist agreed to answer questions by email.

Mike Telin: The Debussy is a beautiful piece, and I don't believe it has been performed in Cleveland for many years. Please share your thoughts on the work.

Leif Ove Andsnes: It is indeed very beautiful, very sensuous, with wonderful waves of sound. The piano goes in and out of being the soloist, other times accompanying solos in the orchestra, or simply being part of the orchestra colour. It has a three-part structure like a normal concerto. It is a monothematic work, meaning that a lot of the material is being drawn from the very first theme presented, an oboe solo at the introduction of the first movement.

MT: I see that you have performed it with MTT before. What do you enjoy about working with him?

LOA: MTT always brings a lot of insight to performances, and a joy of sharing. I have played the Debussy Fantasy with him once before, with the New World Symphony in Miami. MTT loves this piece, and has very carefully looked at dynamic markings and balance in the orchestra score, which is necessary, as Debussy never got around to revising his early work.

MT: Please say a few words about your long relationship with The Cleveland Orchestra.

LOA: I adore the Cleveland Orchestra, and actually made my North American debut with this great orchestra as a 20-year-old, at the Blossom Music Festival with the Grieg Concerto. Every time I play with them, I am struck by the refined sound and the sense of listening and collaborative spirit in the orchestra.

MT: What advice do you have for young pianists who want to pursue a career in music?

LOA: Difficult, as everybody is different. All I can say is follow your instincts, listen and learn as much as possible to the musicians you admire. Forget the social media, and work as sincerely as you can on the music.

MT: How do you achieve balance in your life?

LOA: Family (three children), having a home in Norway, nature, food and wine, exercise, yoga, friends.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 12, 2023.

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