

Many sides of Mozart with Labadie and The Cleveland Orchestra (Apr. 20)

by Peter Feher



Mozart was the main event at Severance Music Center on April 20, but The Cleveland Orchestra gave only a teaser of what it can do with this great composer.

Chalk it up to the small and generally intimate scale of the performance. Guest conductor Bernard Labadie, a specialist in 18th-century repertoire, led the Orchestra — pared down to period-ensemble

numbers — in half a dozen Mozart pieces, many of them excerpts from longer works. You could think of the program as a preview for next season here in Cleveland, which opens with a soundtrack of the composer's greatest hits (accompanying the film *Amadeus* live in concert) and closes with a production of *The Magic Flute*.

On Thursday, everything was building to Mozart's *Symphony No. 41* ("Jupiter"). A piece that bears out the composer's reputation for virtuosity, "Jupiter" is nothing less than the Enlightenment era embodied. The ideals of order, balance, and harmony that informed the arts as much as the sciences in Mozart's time reach an awe-inspiring peak in his final symphony, especially in its final movement.

Labadie was just the right conductor to set the parts of this musical machine in motion, and the Orchestra sounded light, polished, and responsive. As the piece unfolded in perfect proportion, the musicians knew where to dwell (on the interesting dissonances in the second movement) and where to pick up the pace (in the many repeats throughout the third-movement Menuetto and Trio). And when everyone arrived at the finale — the symphony's crowning achievement, in which Mozart manages to combine fugal and sonata forms for a congruous whole — not a note was out of place, propelling the concert to a satisfying conclusion.

The evening began in intriguing operatic fashion, with soprano Lucy Crowe singing a selection of not-your-usual Mozart arias. Despite the composer's ubiquity in opera houses and on concert stages, these are numbers you'd only hear in a performance that strikes a balance between both settings. Crowe approached each aria with appropriate restraint, while Labadie and the Orchestra kept their playing in the realm of accompaniment.

"Ruhe sanft, mein holdes Leben," from Mozart's unfinished opera *Zaide*, let Crowe show off her range with a handful of tastefully tapered high notes. For "Venga la morte ... Non temer, amato bene," an alternate number from *Idomeneo*, the soprano had a scene partner to play off of in concertmaster David Radzynski, who handled the obbligato line with modesty. Less successful was "Giunse alfin il momento ... Al desio di chi t'adora," an aria appended to *The Marriage of Figaro*, in which Labadie couldn't coordinate some sections between the singer and the Orchestra.

Better were the ensemble moments in a pair of purely instrumental works also on the program's first half. Precise cueing gave power and shape to the Overture from *La clemenza di Tito*, and a fascinating blend of reed players figured in Mozart's *Masonic Funeral Music*. Knowing what the Orchestra could accomplish alone with this composer, you couldn't wait for the symphony in store.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 10, 2023.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)