

Kent Blossom Music Festival: students step in for faculty (Aug. 2)

by Peter Feher



The crowd at Ludwig Recital Hall on August 2 got a sneak peek of the Kent Blossom Music Festival's annual side-by-side concert with The Cleveland Orchestra.

A mix of student and faculty players took the stage for Wednesday's program, which was originally meant to feature a trio of past and present Orchestra members. Assistant principal flutist Jessica Sindell still anchored the performance, but her colleagues — pianist Joela Jones and cellist Richard Weiss — had to withdraw, with Jones citing health reasons.

Two student chamber ensembles, coached by Jones and Sindell, were ready to step in, bringing some of the waiting-in-the-wings energy that makes each summer at Kent Blossom so stimulating.

The standout piece of the evening was destined to make a splash. Ernő Dohnányi burst onto the international musical scene of his time with his *Piano Quintet No. 1 in c*. The Hungarian composer was also a virtuoso pianist, so it's no surprise that this 1895 work — his Op. 1, written at the age of 17 — spotlights the instrument of which he had complete command and understanding.

Pianist Li Lun Li launched into the weighty writing of the first movement with passion and soloistic verve. The strings came to the fore in the inner movements, with first violinist Alexandra Maynard leading the quick handoffs in the musical line throughout the Scherzo and cellist Anthony de Clara shining in a handful of lyrical solos in the Adagio. Second violinist Daniela Arias and violist Isabel Barron provided sensitive support where called for.

The wind section was out in full force for Leoš Janáček's sextet *Mládí* (Youth), a mature work the Czech composer completed near the end of his life but in a decidedly playful spirit. Here, Janáček experiments with expanding the possibilities of the traditional wind

quintet by adding a bass clarinet part to darken the overall ensemble sound, though he also brightens the texture by having the flutist double on piccolo for the sprightly Vivace.

Hornist Michael Rising stuck out wonderfully with a big, brassy tone and playing that was pinpoint accurate. And the rest of the ensemble — flutist Darilyn Fine, oboist Corinne Foley, clarinetist Ethan Morad, bass clarinetist Ashrey Shah, and bassoonist Zachary Elmore — navigated solo and accompanying roles like the best of orchestral woodwind sections.

In between the young artists' performances, Sindell offered a pair of lovely, understated pieces, each with a Cleveland connection.

Ernest Bloch was the founder and first musical director of the Cleveland Institute of Music, and his *Suite Modale* is a gem of the flute repertoire. Through simple, melancholy melodies and stark piano accompaniment, Bloch conveys emotions that are nothing short of profound, and together Sindell and pianist Areum Park mined the work for all its expressivity.

Allison Loggins-Hull currently serves as The Cleveland Orchestra's composer-in-residence, and her 2018 piece *Homeland* suggests an artist and musician trying out ideas and coming into her own. Sindell gave the short, unaccompanied work the space it needed, crafting a performance that fit perfectly side-by-side with the substantial offerings from Kent Blossom's young artists.

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