

## ENCORE: “Director’s Carte Blanche” at Oberlin (June 14)

by Max Newman



This year’s ENCORE Music & Ideas Festival, themed around “Planet Earth,” graced the Cleveland area with some brilliant performances over the course of this month. One of those came on the evening of June 14, when Oberlin Conservatory played host to the series.

Violinist and founder Jinjoo Cho, violinist Mathieu Herzog, and pianist Hyunsoo Kim starred in a terrific performance at Warner Concert Hall. The event also featured a conversation with Chris Stanton, the Senior Naturalist at Lorain County Metro Parks, which perfectly served ENCORE’s season theme as an ode to the natural world.

Stanton, a brilliant speaker, set the tone for the evening with a presentation about the importance of water and nature conservation, conveying a sense of urgency and solemnity that would be matched by both the performers and their pieces during the second half.

After the musical portion began, the cohesion between the performers was instantly noticeable. Everything flowed so seamlessly, it was as if the sounds from the stage were emanating from one solitary being rather than a group — individuals acting within an ecosystem.

Reflecting the occasion, the performers played with a sense of sincerity. For every turn in the music being performed, the musicians responded with matching shifts in musical tone, body language, and facial expressions.

Jinjoo Cho was the star of the show. Her velvety tone was enthralling and flexible. Sometimes delicate as a flower, sometimes sharp as a knife; sometimes somber, sometimes gloriously uplifting, Cho was everywhere on the musical map.

The concert started at a fever pitch with a stirring rendition of Handel/Halvorsen's *Passacaglia in g for Violin and Cello*. Cho and cellist Brandon Leonard preserved the piece's inherent tension while also hitting all of its countless, lightning-fast notes loud and clear. It felt like a call to action, the soundtrack to a camera panning over a scene of natural beauty, urging the world to work towards its preservation.

Edvard Grieg's *Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano* conveyed a much more delicate beauty. Cho and pianist Hyunsoo Kim displayed fantastic chemistry, working in tandem to create a stunning, somber soundscape. The fluid and flawless transition into the final release of tension took the audience on a pensive voyage amid a crashing cacophony of sharp piano chords and delightfully strained violin stylings.

The night ended on a hopeful note with W.A. Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante for violin, and viola*. Rivulets of musical bliss from Cho, Herzog, and the orchestra cascaded down upon Warner Hall's expectant onlookers. It was as if the performers were conveying that it's still possible to work for the betterment of our natural world, do all we can to support it, and be a catalyst for positive change.

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