

Elim Chan sculpts endless varieties of glorious sound from Yefim Bronfman, Cleveland Orchestra (Sept.27)



Elim Chan conducts the Cleveland Orchestra and pianist Yefim Bronfman on Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024, at Severance Music Center. Kevin Libal

by Daniel Hathaway | Clevelandclassical.com
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CLEVELAND, Ohio — In the symphonic world, a change of conductor often means a change of repertoire as well. When Elim Chan stepped in to lead four Cleveland Orchestra concerts this weekend featuring Yefim Bronfman in Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 (1909), she swapped out

Stravinsky's *Petrushka* for another Rachmaninoff work, his *Symphonic Dances* (1940).

On paper, that looked like an overabundance of Rachmaninoff, but Chan and the Orchestra made the Russian super-melodist's lavish scores sound freshly minted, transparent, and teeming with exquisite detail.

After hearing numerous performances of "Rach 3" by piano competition hopefuls, it was revelatory on Thursday evening, September 26, to experience the work interpreted by a mature artist who is fully in control of its musical content, and whose transitions can make sense of the composer's mercurial changes of direction.

The unassuming opening theme was regal, and when things heated up, Bronfman projected his crystalline sound through even the densest orchestrations with commanding technique and controlled power.

He created a grand arc with the first-movement cadenza, then snuck back into the opening theme with a beautiful transition.

Bronfman's entrance in the second movement grew organically out of a splendid orchestral introduction that passionately pulled at the heart strings, and his crisp trills during the waltz rang into the hall.

Powerful but relaxed, the all-star team of Bronfman, Chan, and the Orchestra made a perfect transition into the finale. Their playing was confident, their coordination unwavering, and their lush sound carried all the way to the final note.

Thunderous applause was immediate — both from the audience and the orchestra. Bronfman demonstrated his admiration for Chan by insisting on sharing the bows with her and with the Orchestra, even dragging her back onstage for the fourth round of ovations.

After intermission — a well-appreciated breather — the opening pizzicatos of the Symphonic Dances created a transparent sound that allowed a succession of wind solos to shine — including the refreshing timbre of alto saxophonist Gabriel Piqué. The craggy theme ran infectiously through the ensemble during a movement of engaging tempo changes.

A grand fanfare by trumpets and horns introduced the elastic second movement *Tempo di valse*, where solos were seamlessly passed back and forth by English horn (Robert Walters) and oboe (Frank Rosenwein).

A long buildup accompanied by tiny explosions of sound led to hintings of the Gregorian *Dies irae* chant enroute to an extravagant coda that only Sergei Rachmaninoff could have written, and that only The Cleveland Orchestra could have brought off.

Throughout the concert, Elam Chan was simply amazing in her bare-handed ability to sculpt endless varieties of sound from an ensemble with a vast reservoir to draw upon. This was a spectacular evening at Severance Music Center.

The program will be repeated on Friday at 7:30 pm, Saturday at 8:00 pm, and Sunday at 3:00 pm.

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