

## Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra impresses with Boulanger, Copland, and Rachmaninoff



*The Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra performs with conductor Daniel Reith at Severance Music Center on Nov. 24, 2024. Roger Mastroianni*

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By Daniel Hathaway | Cleveland Classical

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Anyone who believes that tired old canard

that classical music is dead or dying needed to hear conductor Daniel Reith and the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra play music by Lily Boulanger, Aaron Copland, and Sergei Rachmaninoff in their Autumn Concert at Severance Music Center on Sunday afternoon, November 24.

That challenging program tested COYO's musicianship. Not only does it run deep, but it's so sophisticated that the young players can make Boulanger sound French, Copland American, and Rachmaninoff Russian.

Boulanger's *D'un Matin de Printemps* was light and airy, conjuring up in its five minutes a Gallic Spring morning with lovely solos by concertmaster Aika Birch and individual winds. Surges suggested the burgeoning surprises nature still had in store.

The Suite from *Appalachian Spring* begins serenely with the open textures Copland invented to picture the spaciousness and possibilities of America. The musicians effortlessly passed its wonderful interlocking lines from player to player, making seamless transitions between sections.

Reith kept tempos brisk in the more rhythmic scenes, and the orchestra reacted with precision. The Shaker tune *Simple Gifts* was simply lovely, and COYO played its

various permutations skillfully, producing a grand sound. The concluding prayer that floated into the heavens was solemn and memorable.

And what could be more Russian sounding in the right hands than Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony? Here, Reith and his colleagues dug into dark, lavish sonorities and indulged in outrageous brilliance as the composer rolled out endless melodies one after the other.

The hour-long symphony, written after the composer broke a lengthy dry spell with the help of hypnotism, was a test on Sunday of the young ensemble's powers of concentration and stamina, and they were up to the challenge.

They luxuriated in Rachmaninoff's expansive lines in the expressive opening movement, during which Reith brought out the score's vast array of colors. A lovely English horn solo by Isabel Martin made a wonderful transition into the Allegro, and a flashy coda ended in a single plunk from cellos and basses.

Reith set a spirited tempo that never flagged for the rondo-like second movement, drawing fine articulations from the strings, cheerful staccatos from the bassoons and grand punctuations from the brass.

The Adagio found Rachmaninoff at his most glorious — piling on one gorgeous harmonic line after another as the music grew and grew. Among the many fine solos were those by principal clarinet Nicholas Garrett and principal horn Jack Berendt, whose golden tones sang out over the orchestral texture.

Keeping the energy going after an eventful 45 minutes, COYO closed out the concert with a triumphant Allegro vivace, crowning a spectacular performance.

The Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra has been in the process of rebuilding since Daniel Reith's arrival on the scene in 2022-2023 following the significant interruptions of COVID. Sunday's performers were on the young end of the Orchestra's age bracket (13-18) but demonstrated months of hard work both individually and collectively.

The audience for the Orchestra's Autumn Concert was probably heavy on parents, grandparents, relatives and friends. It would be wonderful to see the hall also packed with regular Cleveland Orchestra patrons for COYO's Winter Concert with the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Chorus on February 16. They'll be watching the next generation of musicians in action, and they'll be impressed.

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