

A hero's score: Cleveland Orchestra's 'Black Panther' concert reigns at Severance (Mar. 28)

By Daniel Hathaway

This article was originally published on [Cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio — The weather gods weren't kindly disposed to Cleveland Orchestra guest conductor Anthony Parnther last August for his Blossom debut with John Legend. As he reminded his social media followers earlier this month, "We were yanked off the stage a third of the way through the concert because of a storm! This time, we're in the storm-proof majesty of Severance Hall."

"This time" came on Friday, when Parnther presided over *Black Panther* (2018), the first-ever screening of a Marvel Studios film at Severance Music Center. He led a masterful performance of Ludwig's Göransson's Grammy and Oscar-winning score, enhanced by Senegalese talking drum guru Massamba Diop.

Among its many credits, *Black Panther* was the first Marvel Studios film to feature a Black director and a predominantly Black cast. It was nominated for seven awards at the 91st Academy Awards, winning three. It was also the first superhero film to receive a Best Picture nomination, and the first Marvel film to win an Academy Award.

"Good evening Cleveland," Parnther said from the stage, welcoming a large, enthusiastic audience that had already applauded as soon as the house lights were dimmed. He told us that we were going to be taken back to the very beginning of cinema — before there were "talkies" with soundtracks, there was only the film and an ensemble of musicians.

Parnther went on to describe the score as a mishmash of musical styles centered around the tama, a talking drum from Senegal. As Massamba Diop, a master of the instrument, made his way from the back of the hall and onto the stage, the crowd went wild.

Not physically present was the film's star, Chadwick Boseman, who died from colon cancer at the age of 43. Parnther acknowledged that Boseman's family was in attendance and dedicated the performance to his memory.

Fans of Marvel Studios' Black Panther series will need little introduction to the story line, but for those joining the saga in midstream, Boseman's character T'Challa is crowned king of Wakanda following his father's death, but is challenged by Killmonger, who plans to abandon the country's isolationist policies and begin a global revolution.

Wakanda is a fascinating collision between the primitive and the futuristic, pitting the traditional against the technological in images of breathtaking beauty. The score is shot through with musical colors that wonderfully accent dramatic action scenes, as well as its introspective and humorous moments.

Contributions from The Cleveland Orchestra included wonderful solos by principal cello Mark Kosower, intriguing low notes from the basses, contrabassoon and harp, blazing fanfares from the brass, and arresting rhythmic interjections from the percussion that underpinned much of the action. Tender moments were quietly cushioned by the strings. But it was Massamba Diop's inspired playing that connected the musical themes.

Complementing the score, which includes authentic African gestures, are the film's evocative costumes by Ruth E. Carter, which earned her an Academy Award for Best Costume Design. Currently on display in the Smith Lobby, they incorporate elements from different African tribes.

The program will be repeated tonight, March 29 at 7:30 pm at Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center, 11001 Euclid Ave., Cleveland. Tickets are available [online](#).

Daniel Hathaway is founder and editor of the online journal [ClevelandClassical.com](#). He teaches music journalism at Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 3, 2025.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)