

Oberlin Chamber Orchestra Thrills at Finney Chapel (Apr. 3)

by Max Newman



The Oberlin Chamber Orchestra, a flagship ensemble of the Oberlin Conservatory, delivered a sterling performance at Finney Chapel on the evening of April 3. Under the direction of Raphael Jiménez, the performance featured three pieces of varying styles and moods, all played with aplomb.

The technical ability on display was brilliant. One of the more impressive aspects of the performance was the ability of the players to maintain an unerring control of dynamics.

There's something ominous about Anna Clyne's *The Midnight Hour*, which opened the program. It begins with a sweeping flurry of terrifying horn runs while the string section dances maniacally over percussive rumblings. There were moments when a shimmering serenity broke through to the surface. Gorgeous harmonies and exciting countermelodies winked, and smiled as Jiménez and his players offered a heart-throbbing performance.

Quinn Mason's *Serenade for Strings* is a lilting, sunny work that can only be described as gorgeous. Powerful, it glinted and flew like a bird. It had the same sense of purpose as the piece that preceded it, but with a more uplifting mood. It built toward a peak of joy, guided with high notes that trembled like leaves in the air of Finney Chapel. It was hard not to smile as the performance unfolded.

After a brief intermission, Jean Sibelius's sprawling *Symphony No. 3* concluded the evening with a work that grows like a tree and unfolds like a story. By themselves, its three movements would appear to be disparate chapters in this odyssey, but they come together to create something beautifully cohesive.

The opening movement had a wonderful sense of occasion, as if it were sending a group of adventurers forth on a lengthy journey. At times it brimmed with playfulness and at others frolicked defiantly.

Perhaps the most mesmerizing moment was Sibelius's nocturnal second movement, which suggested the soft pattering of rain or the sun setting behind mountaintops. Strings quivered and yearned as their deep frequencies were met by high clarinet and flute melodies that wondered, pondered, and grew in intensity. The final movement resembled the concert's energetic opening but perhaps less anxiously at its core. With pounding timpani and bellowing horns, this was the perfect finale, and a thrilling conclusion to a night of music that kept you on the edge of your seat.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 29, 2025

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)