

Conductor Kazuki Yamada's stylish Cleveland Orchestra debut features Elgar, Mozart, and pianist Francesco Piemontesi (Apr. 24)



Elgar's *Symphony No. 1* is revived by Cleveland Orchestra under the direction of Kazuki Yamada. The British conductor led a passionate performance of once-popular work on Thursday, April 24, at Severance Music Center. Swiss pianist Francesco Piemontesi kicked off the evening with an effortless, captivating performance of Mozart's *Concerto No. 25*. (Photo: Scott Esterly) Esterly Photography LLC

by Stephanie Manning | Cleveland Classical

This article was originally published on Cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Edward Elgar's first symphony was a long time coming. But once the British composer finally put pen to paper at age 51, audiences at the time simply couldn't get enough. But tastes change, and that rapturous response in 1908 couldn't guarantee eternal success. The piece has now settled into relative obscurity for many American

orchestras.

Today, Britain is still the most likely place to hear Elgar's *Symphony No. 1* — so it made sense that The Cleveland Orchestra's performance on April 24 should be led by the conductor of a British ensemble. City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra music director Kazuki Yamada ascended the Severance Music Center podium, making his assured and elegant Cleveland Orchestra debut.

Elgar's symphony is unconcerned with quaint, pastoral English scenes — instead, it's often stormy, celebratory, and in-your-face, sometimes all at once. On Thursday, Yamada confirmed his reputation for passion and expressivity as a conductor in his interpretation of the symphony.

Coordination between the strings and winds got off to an unsteady start. But soon the brass section steamed ahead at full power, trombones and tuba producing a huge, dark

sound. Yamada looked like a pitcher readying to throw a fastball as he cued some of the second-movement cymbal crashes and bass drum strikes.

By the finale, one's attention started to wander as similarly grand and jubilant themes began to repeat themselves. But before that, the third movement provided a respite with a more intimate orchestration featuring strings, winds, and sprinkles of harp. Concertmaster Amy Lee, clarinetist Daniel McKelway, and English hornist Robert Walters delivered some lovely solos.

Beginning the concert, Swiss pianist Francesco Piemontesi's sterling performance of Mozart's *Concerto No. 25* was engrossing from start to finish.

A respected Mozartian, Piemontesi crafted an interpretation that gave grandness and gravitas to the concerto while sounding effortless. His fingers practically glided across the keys at every moment — and if his left hand was otherwise unoccupied, it floated in the air, tracing the arc of the music.

Yamada kept his conducting understated, saving big gestures for the beginnings of phrases and letting the musicians fill in the rest. The second movement was hushed, reverent, and especially captivating as the pianist's fingers descended into the depths of the instrument's low register.

Francesco Piemontesi recently starred in “The Alchemy of the Piano,” a documentary that muses about the inexplicable musical sense that goes beyond pure technique. The pianist's deep engagement with and enjoyment of Mozart's work is something special indeed — and on Thursday evening, it did feel like there was a little bit of magic between every note.

The Mozart and Elgar program repeats at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 25, and 8 p.m. Saturday, April 26, at Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center, 11001 Euclid Ave, Cleveland. Tickets, ranging in price from \$35 to \$179, are available at clevelandorchestra.com.

Stephanie Manning trained as a bassoonist before becoming a correspondent for ClevelandClassical.com. As a freelancer, her writing has also appeared in The Montreal Gazette, CBC Montreal, and Early Music America.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com March 26, 2025.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)