

Elim Chan directs Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom Music Center in Maurice Ravel's *Shéhérazade* with Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1 (Aug. 9)



Elim Chan directs the Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom Music Center Aug. 9, 2025. Esterly Photography LLC

By Kevin McLaughlin | Cleveland Classical

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CUYAHOGA FALLS, Ohio — The Cleveland Orchestra on Saturday offered a summer evening of musical storytelling that was alluring and colorful without excess.

Under the elegant and incisive direction of Elim Chan at Blossom Music Center,

the program paired Maurice Ravel's *Shéhérazade* with Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1 in performances redolent of perfume and sonic splendor.

Coinciding with the 150th anniversary of Maurice Ravel's birth, the opener was *Shéhérazade*, a 1903 song cycle with words by Tristan Klingsor, the pen name of French poet, painter, and composer Léon Leclère.

Together, Ravel and Klingsor shaped a work steeped in the "Orientalist" style of the *Arabian Nights*, emphasizing atmosphere over literal storytelling — an approach mirrored in this performance by soprano Christiane Karg and conductor Elim Chan.

In *Asie* (Asia), the poet dreams of distant, fabled lands, and Ravel conjures their fragrance in images like "I long to take the schooner..." "I long to sail to islands of flowers..." Karg's delivery of each *je voudrais* ("I long to") grew in intensity, and Chan's pacing kept the expressive music spinning.

In *La flûte enchantée*, Karg cast a spell in partnership with flutist Jessica Sindell, whose solos blended intimacy, mystery, and sensuality.

The mood shifted in *L'indifférent*, where voice and orchestra dallied in a half-lit world of provocative suggestion. Chan's measured pace and Karg's sultry soprano left the closing image suspended — like a kiss that lingers.

After intermission, Chan led a patient, slightly restrained Mahler Symphony No. 1 (“Titan”).

The opening *Langsam* unfolded at a measured pace, and nature awakened in gradual layers — cuckoos cuckooed, birds twittered, and spring awakened — before gathering force. Clarinetist Afendi Yusuf and oboist Jeffrey Rathbun supplied beautiful avian sounds, and the brass tested the bounds of excitement.

The second movement was full of rustic swagger as Chan leaned into the country dances without weighing them down. In the third movement, a minor-mode Frère Jacques began with a mock-solemn double bass solo, answered by wry bassoon and droll tuba. Clarinets, oboe, and trumpets burst into the Klezmer-tinged middle section with puckish glee.

The finale erupted with ordered violence, lasting a good long while until its lyrical second theme appeared like a kind face in a crowd. Volatility returned and Chan let the tension mount until the horns rose to their feet, bells aloft, summoning a blazing D-major triumph.

At last, she yielded to the symphony's euphoric lure, bringing the Blossom crowd out of their seats.

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