

## Cleveland Orchestra with pianist Garrick Ohlsson at Severance (Oct. 30)



The Cleveland Orchestra and Garrick Ohlsson teamed up on Thursday at Severance Music Center marking 50 years since their first pairing. Human Artist Photography + Cinema

By Kevin McLaughlin|Cleveland Classical

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CLEVELAND, Ohio — Frequent guest pianist Garrick Ohlsson returned to Severance Music Center on Thursday, Oct. 30, 50 years after his first appearance with The Cleveland Orchestra.

The concert, conducted by Franz Welser-Möst, reminded us why we

cherish these performances year after year: consistent excellence, both familiar and new music, and the company of an artist whose quiet dignity and calm brilliance have become a reliable part of the city’s musical life.

The program opened with “Permissions,” a ten-minute churn by Tyler Taylor, the Orchestra’s new Daniel R. Lewis Composer Fellow. The Louisville, Kentucky-born composer and horn player brings a performer’s instinct for timbre and ensemble dynamics to his writing.

The piece is already in motion when we arrive, as though we’ve happened upon a conversation mid-sentence.

Taylor reshuffles the orchestra’s usual balance. Winds and brass are, in his words, “granted a special kind of permission” to set the agenda, while the strings respond with shimmers and murmurs — sometimes echoing, sometimes gently resisting their wind colleagues.

Activity comes in surges and ideas appear in quick bursts, flashing like points of light in a peripheral vision exam.

Welser-Möst kept a steady hand through these exchanges, offering space for the winds to lead and for the strings to shade and color the texture. The brass projected confidence and principal horn Nathaniel Silberschlag's sound rose warmly.

Near the end, a trio of percussion entered with increasing force — firm strikes that froze the winds and brass in place. Left to themselves, the strings offered soft ascending lines that thinned into an uneasy quiet rather than resolution.

The pianist's arrival for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 settled things. Ohlsson, the 1970 Chopin Competition winner, has long been admired for his musicianship built on artistic breadth, patience, and unforced authority.

He offered the first movement Allegro at a natural pace, shaping phrases with an economical touch and a clear objective. This was fresh, weightless Mozart — lines honest and well-lit. Principal clarinet Afendi Yusuf joined with a mellow, singing tone, and the two exchanged lines with an easy rapport.

Welser-Möst kept the orchestra light and flexible. The strings matched Ohlsson's phrasing and motion, anticipating both forward movement and repose. Winds added color in gentle strokes and Ohlsson's cadenza was clear and unfussy.

The Adagio arrived like a held breath. Mozart seldom wrote in F-sharp minor, and the movement's quiet, rocking rhythm hints at his study of Bach, with occasional leaps that startle in their height. The wind texture — two clarinets and a single flute — was suffused with light. Ohlsson let each note fall naturally and the orchestra listened closely, offering a soft cushion of sound beneath him. The final movement brought brightness again, and sparkle without excess.

After the applause, Ohlsson offered a brief encore: Chopin's Waltz in C-sharp minor, played plainly with inner warmth.

Robert Schumann's Rhenish Symphony closed the evening with firm, renewed energy. Schumann completed it in 1850, partly inspired by the Rhineland's landscape and the solemn grandeur of Cologne Cathedral. The composer is sometimes faulted for dense textures, but Welser-Möst kept the pulse moving and the lines clear, and the music felt freshly conceived. The opening movement stepped forward with breadth and purpose, anchored by the confident horn section. The scherzo moved with an easy sway, and the slow movement unfolded in calm, rounded phrases from the strings, joined by warm woodwind color.

Schumann's 4/2 meter and the solemn trombone choir gave the fourth movement weight without heaviness, and the finale brought light and lift. The applause came quickly.

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