

Cleveland Orchestra with English horn soloist Robert Walters at Severance (Nov. 13)



The Cleveland Orchestra feat. Robert Walters on English horn Roger Mastroianni

By Daniel Hathaway|Cleveland Classical

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CLEVELAND, Ohio – The keyword for Thursday evening November 13 at Severance Music Center was stamina.

Without that essential quality, the performance of two demanding works by English hornist Robert Walters and The Cleveland

Orchestra, led by guest conductor Tugan Sokhiev, might have fallen flat.

Instead, the concert entered the record books as a meticulously played sonic spectacular.

Geoffrey Gordon's Mad Song, written in 2020 after a fascinating [poem](#) by the 18th-century English mystic William Blake, was commissioned for Dimitri Mestdag, solo English horn of the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra.

The soloist narrates the poem in Gordon's three continuous movements, which traverse the entire range of the instrument and ask for every possible musical gesture from an instrument often relegated to a pastoral role due to its characteristic sound.

Here, the composer takes the soloist to the brink, and although the concerto is scored for a large orchestra with a huge percussion section plus piano, celesta and harp, Gordon has given Walters, the Orchestra's solo English horn, a lot of breathing space, skillfully orchestrating it so the instrument never has to fight with the orchestra.

At the opening, the English horn rises out of a sound cloud of percussion, winds and brass. Walters played his long musical lines with a beautiful, rich tone that sang out in the hall.

Solo cadenzas were cleverly written and brilliantly played, with multiple colors, music that jumps from low to high register, and long, legato lines punctuated with vivid short notes.

Throughout, Gordon created solo opportunities for many other instruments, especially the bass clarinet. Sokhiev guided everything with meticulous precision, and the large audience was quick to give soloist, orchestra and composer a standing ovation.

Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 6 in A minor, which bears the nickname "Tragic," even though the composer rejected that, filled the 80-minute second half of the concert with an astonishing volume and variety of sounds.



The Cleveland Orchestra conducted by Tugan Sokhiev Roger Mastroianni

Sokhiev obviously knew exactly what he wanted from his orchestral colleagues. Conducting without baton, he drew a big, lean sound from the ensemble in the multi-hued opening march — not in this case the customary Mahlerian funeral procession — and all the transitions were magical.

The Andante was graced by a lush solo from principal horn Nathan Silberschlag and another from concertmaster Amy Lee that reached to the heavens. The

movement ended with an exquisite final chord.

The Scherzo was lilting and sensual, its suspenseful ending leading the way to a Finale that began with celestial music and developed into the symphony's second march.

Mahler's final movement wins the prize for 19th-century long goodbyes amid splendid solos by tubist Yasuhito Sugiyama, hornist Nathan Silberschlag, oboist Frank Rosenwein and the brass section. And of course, the famous hammer blows of fate, reduced from five to two by the superstitious composer and delivered with an outsized cudgel by Marc Damoulakis.

At the end of the evening, you wished you could have bottled the amazing sonorities produced by The Cleveland Orchestra and taken them home with you. No recording could do justice to this kind of live music.

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