

## Cleveland Orchestra hits a triple in Blossom program with Stéphane Deneve (review)

Stéphane Deneve credit drewfarrell.jpg

Conductor Stéphane Deneve led the Cleveland Orchestra Saturday at Blossom Music Center in a program of Stravinsky, Schumann and Tchaikovsky. *(Drew Farrell)*

**Special to The Plain Dealer** By **Special to The Plain Dealer**

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**By MARK SATOLA**

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Ohio -- Given the tendency toward popular programming during the Cleveland Orchestra's summer seasons at the Blossom Music Center, Saturday night's concert must count as a fairly serious enterprise, with neither a Broadway salute nor "Carmina Burana" anywhere within hailing distance.

Stéphane Denève, chief conductor of the Stuttgart Radio Symphony and principal guest conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, led a lineup of Stravinsky's "Dumbarton Oaks" Concerto, Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor with English pianist Paul Lewis, and Tchaikovsky's hyper-dramatic Symphony No. 4 in F minor.

Denève is also the recently appointed director of the new Center for Future Orchestral Repertoire, a project of the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra, dedicated to identifying 21st-century works likely to become repertoire standards, in the future, of course. Denève also assumes the post of the Brussels Phil's chief conductor, beginning with the 2015-16 season.

Given his affinity for new music, it's no surprise that his reading of Stravinsky's 1938 "Dumbarton Oaks" Concerto in E-flat (which, though hardly new, was the newest work on the program) was a model of rhythmic precision, exquisite balances and satisfying shape.

Denève, who eschewed the baton for this work, conducted with an unusual technique that might be described as diagrammatic, an effective approach for this music, which can be seen as something of an ingenious mechanism, devoid of expressive emotion but rich with contrapuntal felicities and wit. Noteworthy contributions by principal flutist Joshua Smith, assistant principal clarinetist Daniel McKelway and assistant principal bassoonist Barrick Stees earned them solo bows.

Paul Lewis made his Cleveland Orchestra debut at this concert, playing Schumann's A-minor piano concerto. His approach to the well-worn classic was thoughtful and measured, allowing the dramatic arc of the substantial first movement to find its natural climax at the cadenza, which Lewis played with fervor and impeccable technique.

Under Denève's baton (he used one here, and for the Tchaikovsky as well), the orchestra was more than accompanist; Denève's alert shaping made the players collaborators with the soloist to a more than usual degree.

Lewis also had an encore up his sleeve, the wistful Allegretto in C minor by Schubert, another piece well-suited to a performer whose formidable abilities are ever in the service of an intelligent artistry.

Denève sought to bring new life to another well-known work, the Symphony No. 4 by Tchaikovsky, and was mostly successful, delivering a performance that bowled over the audience, though there were a couple of misfires in the inner movements, and his hell-for-leather approach to the finale telegraphed Tchaikovsky's already powerful knockout punch.

The opening movement promised much, with Denève's masterful control of tempo and pulse, bringing a welcome structural unity to a movement that can often be discursive, while paying close attention to phrase-shaping that allowed the drama to breathe without the hyperventilation that is always a risk with Tchaikovsky.

Despite lovely rich textures from the orchestra, the Andante was undercut by extra-slow tempos that allowed the music to wander a little; and the whisper-soft pizzicati of the Scherzo were almost completely inaudible halfway back in the pavilion, leading one to wonder what the lawn crowd was able to hear.

For the audience, at least, all was forgiven with Denève's take on the final Allegro con fuoco, which he drove at an impossibly fast pace that accelerated even more in the coda, bringing the astonished audience to its feet and the conductor back for several curtain calls. After the fourth one, Denève had to wave an unmistakable goodbye, lest the crowd keep him there all night.

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