

THE
**CLEVELAND
ORCHESTRA**
FRANZ WELSER-MÖST

**MEMORY &
TRANSFORMATION**

1.7 In Focus Season 1 Episode No. 7

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THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
Franz Welser-Möst, conductor

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)
Chamber Symphony, Opus 110a
*(arranged for string orchestra
by Rudolf Barshai from String Quartet No. 8)*

1. Largo
2. Allegro molto
3. Allegretto
4. Largo
5. Largo

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908-1992)
Le Christ, lumière du Paradis
[Christ, Light of Paradise]
from *Éclairs sur l'Au-Delà*
[Illuminations from the Beyond]

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CONCERT OVERVIEW

REFLECTING on the one-year anniversary of the global pandemic, Franz Welser-Möst leads a program bringing together two 20th-century works of contemplation and loss, hope and understanding.

First comes Shostakovich's Chamber Symphony, adapted from his Eighth String Quartet. This is a piece layered in meaning — filled with fascinating self-references and musical allusions, and dedicated "in memory of victims of fascism and war." Such a moving work captures music's ability to ask questions and seek answers.

The program concludes with a transformative vision by Olivier Messiaen, drawn from the last piece he wrote. Here the composer drew on his deep faith and belief in eternal life to depict an ever-expanding vision of the universe threaded with stars, birdsongs, and never-ending light.

Context Matters: One of the more intricate and artful aspects in programming a concert presentation — or a broadcast or a recording album — is choosing what follows which other piece. How the music commences and continues through the journey of the moment. And, thus, how different works can affect an audience's experience of each. It can be very much like sequencing courses of food at an elaborate (or even a simple) meal, cleansing or clearing the palette between astringent tastes, or layering one flavor on top of another. Contrasting and similar soundworlds — each filled with feeling and understanding, together amplifying the other.

Franz Welser-Möst has clear and well-honed sensibility in this regard. And this broadcast presentation ably demonstrates the power of well-chosen juxtaposition: from the end of Shostakovich's Chamber Symphony to the opening of the final movement of Messiaen's final composition. With proximity, they comment on and support the emotional atmosphere between them. Here, these two pieces seem particularly resonant and in accord, with the musical vocabularies shifting between Shostakovich and Messiaen uniquely able to manifest the kind of light (and understanding) that Messiaen the Frenchman was so sure of through his Catholic faith, and for which the Russian master Shostakovich was equally confounded to find in his own life (except, perhaps, through his own artistry as a gift for others).

—Eric Sellen

ABOUT THE MUSIC

CHAMBER SYMPHONY, Opus 110a
by **Dmitri Shostakovich** (1906-1975)
(arranged by Rudolf Barshai for string orchestra from String Quartet No. 8)

*Composed: original quartet written in July 1960;
chamber symphony version adapted 1960-61
in consultation with the composer*

Premiered: quartet was premiered October 2, 1960

Scored for: string orchestra

Duration: just over 20 minutes

THE EIGHTH is Shostakovich's bleakest string quartet, evoking a stark soundscape that is hardly disturbed even by the appalling ferocity of its second movement. The composer created it while visiting Dresden in 1960, when work had only begun to rebuild that shattered city from World War II's destruction. Ruins and rubble were still scattered about, daily reminders of the war's immense toll.

Shostakovich wrote this quartet in a matter of days and dedicated it to "the victims of Fascism and war."

Yet, according to *Testimony*, the much-disputed book of Shostakovich's thoughts about his own music, the composer commented: "*Naturally, Fascism is repugnant to me, but not only German Fascism, any form of it is repugnant. I haven't forgotten the terrible pre-war years at home. The Eighth is an autobiographical quartet.*"

More than in any other work, Shostakovich here indulges in self-quotation (many have also noted or sensed music shadowing other composers' works, including Strauss's *Metamorphosen* for strings). The opening Largo is a fugato recalling Beethoven's late manner while featuring the transliterated first four letters of Shostakovich's name: D-S(=E-flat)-C-H(=B-natural). This musical motif had already appeared in his Tenth Symphony.

Here in the quartet, there immediately follows a quotation from the First Symphony, dating back to 1925, a wayward two-part dialog between first and second violins, then first violins and violas.

Later, a reminiscence of the Fifth Symphony is heard, full of ironic reference to Stalin. Overall, this first movement remains static and bare, making much of alternating between major and minor harmonies.

Picking up a figure from the end of the first movement, the second breaks in with unrelenting savagery. Only once does the volume drop below *fortissimo*, and then not for long, and always against a backdrop very like gunfire. Here, too, Shostakovich brings in a quotation, this time a searing Jewish theme is pressed into service from the Piano Trio of 1944.

The third movement is an ironic waltz, based on the DSCH motif. It slips from 3/4 time to 4/4 time and introduces the opening of the First Cello Concerto, a very recent work at the time of the Eighth Quartet.

These ideas are grotesquely enlarged in the fourth movement with violent outbursts against sustained string tone. A well-known Russian song, "Languishing in Prison," is heard, followed by a quotation, on a high solo cello, of a melody from the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, a work that had so incensed Stalin in 1935.

Another bleak movement is scarcely necessary, but Shostakovich needs to return to the wandering, lost fugato on DSCH. No more deathly close had been written since Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony.

—*program note by Hugh Macdonald* © 2021

ABOUT THE MUSIC

LE CHRIST, LUMIÈRE DU PARADIS

[CHRIST, LIGHT OF PARADISE]

by **Olivier Messiaen** (1908-1992)

Movement 11

from Éclairs sur l’Au-Delà

[Illuminations from the Beyond]

Composed: 1988-1991

*Scored for: this movement utilizes violins and violas in multiple parts,
plus two cellos and three triangles*

*Premiere: November 5, 1992, New York City,
with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta*

Duration: not quite 10 minutes

OLIVIER MESSIAEN’S *Éclairs sur l’Au-Delà*, or “Illuminations from the Beyond,” is an immense work for a very large orchestra. It was the composer’s last completed composition. The first performance took place just a few months after his death, presented by the orchestra that had commissioned it to celebrate their 150th anniversary, the New York Philharmonic. Here, as in so many of his earlier works, Messiaen explores his faith in the great mystical traditions of Christianity — in this case, looking at the Book of Revelation and its visionary panorama of apocalypse.

Within this framework, Messiaen also incorporated the experience of birdsong, which was not only his lifelong passion, but for him a particular avenue to the divine.

Here he also demonstrated artistic faith in techniques that had evolved early in his career, some based on Hindu rhythms, others on a series of scales and modes. With each, he always managed to expound his methods with great clarity, neither boasting of its brilliance nor veiling its meaning.

Indeed, even his religious faith, which must be the most inaccessible part of his make-up to unbelievers, he treated as if it had no complication or mystery for anyone. This was naïveté of a fine and noble kind, for it went hand in hand with an optimism that drew Messiaen away from the darker aspects of life. “*Sin and dirt are not interesting,*” he said.

This composer’s faith — in many aspects of life and the hereafter — opened the prospect of salvation, of transfiguration, of resurrection, of glory and, of the certainty of the afterlife.

This contrast in mindset with Shostakovich is striking, for many of us in this modern world find it easier to grasp the latter’s persistent expression of emptiness and struggle than to relate to a figure who inoculated himself against the world’s atrocities by effortlessly focusing on the beauties of nature and on the divine.

The eleventh and final movement of Messiaen's last work is titled *Le Christ, lumière du Paradis* or "Christ, Light of Paradise." At the head of this movement, he wrote out a passage from Revelation: "And the city hath no need of the sun, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And his servants shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads, for the Lord God shall give them light."

This movement is scored for violins and violas divided into many parts, and two cellos, with the almost inaudible tinkle of three triangles sustained throughout. The rest of the orchestra is silent. The music moves at an extremely slow pace. And the players always move at the same time, from one dense chord to the next, as the topmost line marks out a slow theme that recurs more than once. The harmony is rich and intense, with the occasional common triad unadorned by spicy chromaticism. The final pages of the Bible have surely never been represented in notes as visionary as these.

—program note by Hugh Macdonald © 2021

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CONDUCTOR: FRANZ WELSER-MÖST

Music Director, Kelvin Smith Family Endowed Chair, The Cleveland Orchestra

Franz Welser-Möst is among today's most distinguished conductors. The 2020-21 season marks his nineteenth year as music director of The Cleveland Orchestra, with the future of their acclaimed partnership extended to 2027, making him the longest-serving musical leader in the ensemble's history. The *New York Times* has declared Cleveland under Welser-Möst's direction to be "America's most brilliant orchestra," praising its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion.

With Welser-Möst, The Cleveland Orchestra has been praised for its inventive programming, its ongoing support for new musical works, and for its innovative work in presenting semi-staged and staged operas. An imaginative approach to juxtaposing newer and older works has opened new dialogue and fresh insights for musicians and audiences alike. The Orchestra has also been hugely successful in building up a new and, notably, a young audience. To date, the Orchestra and Welser-Möst have been showcased around the world in nineteen international tours together. In 2020, they launched the ensemble's own recording label and a brand-new digital streaming platform to continue and extend sharing their artistry globally; the 2020-21 season is also inaugurating an original digital concert series titled *In Focus*, for viewing worldwide.

As a guest conductor, Mr. Welser-Möst enjoys a particularly close and productive relationship with the Vienna Philharmonic. He has twice appeared on the podium for their celebrated New Year's Concert, and regularly conducts the orchestra in subscription concerts in Vienna, as well as on tours in Japan, China, Australia, and the United States. Highlights of recent and upcoming guest conducting appearances include performances of Strauss's *Die Aegyptische Helena* at Teatro alla Scala and *Elektra* at the Vienna State Opera, and concerts with the New York Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic. He is a regular guest at the Salzburg Festival, where his work leading a series of opera performances has been widely acclaimed. These have included *Rusalka*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Fidelio*, *Die Liebe der Danae*, Aribert Reimann's *Lear*, and Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra*. The success of both *Salome* and *Rosenkavalier* led the Festival to schedule encore performances in subsequent years.

From 2010 to 2014, Franz Welser-Möst served as general music director of the Vienna State Opera. His partnership with the company included a wide-ranging repertoire, including a series of critically-praised new productions. Mr. Welser-Möst had earlier led the Zurich Opera across a decade-long tenure, conducting more than forty new productions.

During the 2020 Salzburg Festival, Mr. Welser-Möst was awarded the festival ruby pin and the Salzburg Badge of Honor. In 2019, he was awarded the Gold Medal in the Arts by the Kennedy Center International Committee on the Arts in recognition of his long-lasting impact on the international arts community. Other honors include the Vienna Philharmonic's "Ring of Honor" for his longstanding personal and artistic relationship with the ensemble, recognition from the Western Law Center for Disability Rights, honorary membership in the Vienna Singverein, and the Kilenyi Medal from the Bruckner Society of America.

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

ONE OF THE FEW major American orchestra's founded by a woman, The Cleveland Orchestra's inaugural concert took place in December 1918, at a time of renewed optimism and progressive community ideas. By the middle of the century, with its own concert hall, the decades of growth and sustained effort had turned the ensemble into one of the most-admired around the world. Under the leadership of Franz Welser-Möst since 2002, The Cleveland Orchestra has extended its artistry and musical abilities and remains one of the most sought-after performing ensembles in the world — year after year setting standards of extraordinary artistic excellence, creative programming, and community engagement. In recent years, the *New York Times* has called it “the best in America” for its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion, “virtually flawless,” and “one of the finest ensembles in the country (if not the world).”

The partnership with Franz Welser-Möst, begun in 2002 and entering its 19th year with the 2020-21 season, has earned The Cleveland Orchestra unprecedented residencies in the U.S. and around the world, including one at the Musikverein in Vienna, the first of its kind by an American orchestra. It also performs regularly at important European summer festivals. The Orchestra's 100th season in 2017-18 featured two international tours, concluding with the presentation on three continents of Welser-Möst's *Prometheus Project* featuring Beethoven Symphonies and overtures; these Beethoven concerts were presented in May and June 2018, at home in Cleveland, in Vienna's Musikverein, and in Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

The Cleveland Orchestra has a long and distinguished recording and broadcast history. A series of DVDs (available through Clasart Classics) and CD recordings under the direction of Mr. Welser-Möst continues to add to an extensive and widely praised catalog of audio recordings made during the tenures of the ensemble's earlier music directors. In addition, Cleveland Orchestra concerts are heard in syndication each season on radio stations throughout North America and Europe.

From 2020 forward, a number of new digital media initiatives are being launched to share and extend the ensemble's artistry globally. These include debut releases on the Orchestra's own recording label, an ongoing series of podcasts titled “On A Personal Note,” a new digital streaming platform named Adella (after the Orchestra's founder Adella Prentiss Hughes), and a series of premium concert broadcasts created from the 2020-21 season titled *In Focus*.

For more information, visit: www.clevelandorchestra.com.

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The Cleveland Orchestra is proud of its long-term partnership with Kent State University, made possible in part through generous funding from the State of Ohio.

The Cleveland Orchestra is proud to have its home, Severance Hall, located on the campus of Case Western Reserve University, with whom it has a long history of collaboration and partnership.