

# DESMOND HOEBIG

## Cellist

### Orchestra's guest conductor proves mastery of Beethoven and Brahms

November 15, 2008, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Zachary Lewis

The Cleveland orchestra wouldn't have much to play this weekend, were it not for two of the so-called three B's, Beethoven and Brahms. (The missing b is Bach.)

But even if these great masters couldn't leave the sizzling impressions they do without help from another, slightly less renowned B, Herbert Blomstedt.

Once again, the conductor laureate of the San Francisco Symphony, in town this weekend and next on his third visit to Severance Hall, defends his status as a vital, commanding presence on the podium. Still powerful at 81, he cuts straight to the beating hearts of two seminal scores, Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 and the Brahms 'Double' Concerto.

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Concertmaster William Preucil and outgoing principal cellist Desmond Hoebig have even more to say as soloists in the Brahms 'Double' Concerto.

The concerto is hardly a fight, but Preucil and Hoebig still prove evenly matched. Neither musician overshadows the other as they imitate each other's manner of articulation and pick up phrases where the other leaves off. Blomstedt takes care of the rest, charging the atmosphere with orchestral thunderbolts.

In terms of pure sound, too, both soloists possess unique qualities that complement and stand apart from the other. Where Hoebig's tone is rich and plaintive, Preucil's is winsome and refined. Nowhere does the pair exploit this close sonic relationship more effectively than in the tender Andante.

Many artists devolve into argument in the Finale. Not these two. Both find ways to balance fire and ice, turning in cool-headed, polished performances.

With Hoebig leaving at season's end, the Brahms 'Double' probably marks his last concerto here as principal. Let's hope he follows Blomstedt's lead and returns as a guest.

### Cleveland Orchestra's cellist is triumphant in Dvorak performance

May 10, 2008, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Donald Rosenberg

Orchestras usually go into the import business when addressing the subject of soloists, but they often need look no further than their own stages.

Could anyone today, for example, give a more heartwarming or focused performance of Dvorak's Cello Concerto than Desmond Hoebig, the Cleveland Orchestra's principal cellist, who had a triumph in the work Thursday at Severance Hall?

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Different, yes; better, no.

With the concerto, Hoebig and company initiated an unofficial Dvorak festival that continues Sunday at 2 p.m. with a prelude concert of chamber music. The festivities culminate in concert performances of Dvorak's opera "Rusalka" on Thursday, June 5, and Saturday, June 7.

Future Dvorak champions might be hard-pressed to top the artistry Hoebig and peers are offering in the concerto. The cellist was a paragon of interpretive sensitivity, projecting vibrant sound into the hall even as he lavished the impassioned messages with ardent and poetic shading.

The piece's taxing demands rarely come across with such clarity or purpose.

Hoebig benefited mightily from his collaborative team. This week's Austrian-born guest conductor, Hans Graf, is music director of the Houston Symphony, whose principal cello chair Hoebig occupied before coming to Cleveland in 2003. Graf was an elegant presence throughout Thursday's concert, especially in providing the flexibility, balance and tonal sumptuousness Dvorak's beloved score requires.

Hoebig gave spacious voice to the work's fervent phrases, and he couldn't have been surrounded by more distinguished orchestral soloists. Among the masters were Franklin Cohen, who'll seize the solo limelight next week in Copland's Clarinet Concerto, and a horn section that applied honey to every tender outpouring...

### Cleveland Orchestra's cellist delivers stunning performance

December 4, 2006, Canton (Ohio) Repository, Emily Wiedenhamer

Soloist Desmond Hoebig promised that Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1 was "incredibly powerful, very emotional, and very physically aggressive."

Hoebig, the principal cellist of the Cleveland Orchestra, delivered on that promise in a stunning performance at Umstattd Hall on Sunday night. He attacked the first movement with frenzied bursts of energy, dazzling audiences as he reached to the lowest, then the highest, notes in the cello's register in quick succession. The orchestra responded enthusiastically, and the occasional (and unexpected) timpani blasts punctuating the piece only gave it more energy.

In the somber and wistful second movement, Hoebig wrung every last drop of emotion possible from the cello's strings, channeling Shostakovich's own passion and anguish. His rendition of the harmonic passage near the end of the second movement was eerie and surreal, almost ghostly. Listening to Hoebig's sorrowful playing, the audience glimpsed at least musically the realities of Soviet life.

The third movement's solo cadenza lasted just five minutes, entirely too short when a musician like Hoebig is performing. The concerto closes with a finale that Music Director Gerhardt Zimmermann referred to as an "absolutely bizarre, demented waltz." Soloist and orchestra alike rang with defiance, delivering Shostakovich's message of ultimate triumph in spite of oppression.

The concert opened and closed with works by Mozart: March in D Major, K. 335; Symphony in D Major, K. 320; and Symphony No. 36 in C Major ("Linz").

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The reduced orchestra's interpretation of the short march was crisp and bright, balancing the strings and winds nicely and spotlighting the oboe. The Symphony in D Major bristled with a restrained but invigorating energy, always moving, even in the slower passages. Mozart's work, in general, is more restrained than Shostakovich's, and the orchestra performed accordingly.

The final piece of the evening was the Symphony No. 36 in C Major. It is a fine piece, and the orchestra gave a fine performance of it. Still, after the passionate and fiery cello concerto, going back to the more noble and restrained Mozart was a bit of a letdown — which reflects all the more highly on the performance that Hoebig and the orchestra gave.

### Performance a triumph, with a little help from audience

March 19, 2005, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Donald Rosenberg

Henri Dutilleux turned to Charles Baudelaire for the title of his cello concerto, "Tout un monde lointain . . ." ("A Whole Distant World . . ."). But it isn't necessary to be too literal when searching for meaning in this work, just as a listener shouldn't try to follow a Nietzschean road map in Richard Strauss' tone poem, "Also sprach Zarathustra," or go a-hunting in Haydn's Symphony No. 82 ("The Bear").

David Robertson and the Cleveland Orchestra did their jobs in all of these pieces Thursday night at Severance Hall by focusing on the musical narratives. The performances of works from three centuries were vibrant.

Robertson, who becomes music director of the St. Louis Symphony in September, presided over the night's scores with bountiful energy and keen attention to details, balance and sonority. He also proved a good-humored host, especially when the pages on the music stand that principal cellist Desmond Hoebig was using as soloist in the Dutilleux decided to flap in the wind.

"Don't you just love live concerts?" Robertson said as he left the stage to secure a book to plant on Hoebig's music stand and ward off the dastardly air.

Hoebig still had to contend with the draft during the early portions of the concerto, though associate concertmaster Ellen dePasquale and then a woman in the front row — now, that's audience participation! — helped to hold the music in place. Luckily, the cellist was in full control of Dutilleux's atmospheric 1970 work, in which ethereal dabs of color and explosive gestures dramatically evoke the French composer's kaleidoscopic soundscape.

This was an outstanding and brave solo debut. Hoebig was elegant whether exploring reflective or skitish territory. The tricky high positions, harmonics and acrobatic passages gave the cellist no pause. His command of tonal nuances provided worlds, both distant and immediate, of expressive allure.

Robertson and the orchestra collaborated with superb flexibility and transparency. At the end, the conductor jumped from the stage to hand a bouquet to the helpful woman in the front row...

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