



December 06, 2009

## **Ivan Fischer leads Cleveland Orchestra in fiery Rachmaninoff, elegant Beethoven** By Mark Satola, Special to The Plain Dealer

Sergei Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 is a peroration of the Romantic symphony, written from the vantage point of a post-Romantic sensibility. It's brilliantly orchestrated, contrapuntally complex and replete with indelible melodies that, once heard, refuse forevermore to leave one's imagination. It's also overlong, taxing to both performer and audience, texturally thick and sonically impenetrable, weighed down with world-weariness and substantially thin. One can feel as if he or she has just been taken on an arduous journey from point A to point A.

**Both qualities were on display this weekend when guest conductor Ivan Fischer led the Cleveland Orchestra in Rachmaninoff's symphony, along with the overture to Carl Maria von Weber's opera "Der Freischutz" and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, with American pianist Richard Goode.**

If the Rachmaninoff Second must be played, then Fischer's approach is probably the best way to do it. He led with brisk, no-nonsense tempos (that nevertheless did not rush) and a concern for orchestral transparency. **It's a sensibility that made the Weber and Beethoven pieces sound almost George Szell-like**, and kept the Rachmaninoff work from bogging down in itself. Fischer seemed especially careful to allow Rachmaninoff's most striking orchestral effects to be realized effectively. Some of the baleful passages in the development of the opening movement were especially dark and not a little creepy. The many brass flourishes at climactic moments were well-burnished and, thankfully, not overloud, which to my mind increased their impact. The current fashion of performing the uncut score, which Fischer chose to do, is unfortunate, as it underlines the aforementioned problems of taxing length and a suspicion that Rachmaninoff is overarguing the point. Fischer's sure handling of the score suggests that the 45-minute version, with cuts approved by the composer himself, would have resulted in a leaner and more satisfying performance.

**Pianist Goode, with his Lisztian shock of white hair, cut a picturesque figure at the keyboard for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, which he played with a virtuosic elan that never transgressed boundaries of taste. Goode and Fischer have recorded all the Beethoven piano concertos, and this performance of the Third fulfilled the expectation of an airtight artistic interface between the two musicians.** The outer movements were cleanly delineated and well-argued, though in the finale there was a sense of slight fatigue in Goode's passagework, which was at times less articulated and crisp than it might have been.

**The high point was the heartfelt middle movement, which Goode rendered in a moving, almost transcendental manner.**

The evening's curtain-raiser, Weber's "Freischutz" Overture, afforded the most pleasant surprise, thanks to Fischer's light touch and dramatic urgency. The performance harked back to the Szell era, when the Cleveland Orchestra first electrified the music world as a large ensemble that played with chamber-orchestra flexibility and intensity.

**FRANK SALOMON ASSOCIATES**

121 West 27<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 703, New York, NY 10001

tel: 212.581.5197; fax: 212.581.4029; e-mail: [info@franksalomon.com](mailto:info@franksalomon.com) [www.franksalomon.com](http://www.franksalomon.com)