

Concert Review, MLA Style (Houston)

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Writer's name and page number, flush right on every page.

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Concert Review: Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra performed a stunning concert Saturday evening, February 23, 2008. Those who came, filling Music Hall to almost two-thirds capacity, were immersed in what became a soul-searching musical experience provided by Maestro John Adams. The program selections and the exquisite performances offered the audience an opportunity to expand their appreciation for contemporary music.

Houston begins with the time and place of the concert and then gives his overall evaluation of the performance.

Opening this energetic program was *Tod und Verklärung* ("Death and Transfiguration"), a tone poem by Richard Strauss. Following the Strauss, Adams led the orchestra in *On the Transmigration of Souls* and, after the intermission, *The Dharma at Big Sur*, both composed by Adams.

Houston provides context by listing the pieces on the program.

Strauss wrote *Tod und Verklärung*, a lively musical stampede, when he was just twenty-five years old. This seems to be a relatively young age to tackle such a profoundly heavy subject. In his preconcert talk, Adams observed that at the time Strauss was "a bit overwhelmed at his own orchestral virtuosity." Very effective in the introduction of this tone poem is the motif played by the timpani suggesting the faltering heartbeat of a dying elderly man. Then the music grows to a galloping romp—a very young Strauss's concept of the old man's entrance into Glory Land. At least this is the generally accepted interpretation.

This section vividly describes the history and sound of the Strauss composition.

Marginal annotations indicate **MLA-style formatting** and **effective writing**.

Listening carefully, one can hear partway through the Glory Land section the faltering heart still beating. Strauss might be giving us pre-death hallucinations followed by a slightly subdued entrance into heaven.

Houston evaluates how the orchestra performed the piece, giving supporting details from the performance.

The orchestra under Adams gave an intense interpretation of this Strauss masterpiece. The gentle, soft voice usually brought to this orchestra by music director Paavo Järvi would have added a welcome intensified dramatic contrast to what was a rendition with merely adequate drama under Adams's baton.

It is strange to think of the Strauss piece as whimsical. It is a heavyweight probe into heavyweight matter. However, in his preconcert talk to the early concertgoers, Adams said that he added it to the program as "whimsy" but that it might not have been the most effective selection because it added more weight to an already heavy program. The truth of this comment became apparent during Adams's own *On the Transmigration of Souls*.

Transition contrasts the first work on the program with the next work to be discussed.

As the program notes by Richard E. Rodda indicate, *Transmigration* was originally written for and performed by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in honor of the victims of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Adding to the orchestra the voices of the May Festival Chorus, the Cincinnati Children's Choir, and a prerecorded soundtrack, Adams transformed Music Hall into a cathedral. Adams's music avoids evoking the terrible scenes seen so many times, using as the text the simple, heartrending statements of both victims and their loved ones. Each poignant word was sung exquisitely, every phrase clearly understood through the appropriate musical dissonance of the orchestra.

Houston provides background, description, and an opinion about the performance of the second piece.

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The depth of the significance of this work cannot be overstated. Adams captured this event not only through the souls of the victims but also through the souls of the surviving loved ones and the souls of all whose lives were forever changed that morning. The performance began with Adams standing motionless in a silent hall, and it ended with him standing motionless in a silent hall. It seemed almost a sacrilege to clap, but that is all an audience can do. It was like clapping after Communion. Soon Robert Porco, director of the May Festival Chorus, and Robyn Lana, director of the Cincinnati Children's Choir, appeared with Adams to accept a well-deserved tribute from the audience. This seemed to make the extended applause more appropriate and a welcome emotional release.

Houston uses vivid description to give readers a sense of what it was like to attend the concert.

Following the intermission, violinist Leila Josefowicz appeared with the orchestra to perform Adams's *The Dharma at Big Sur*. This is quintessential Adams at his compositional best. The entire work sounds improvisational, especially the solo violin. The instrument, made especially for Josefowicz, is a six-string electric violin with a very wide range, so different from a traditional violin that the performer is required to learn new technique to play it. The music, moving beyond traditional Western tones, employs quarter, or in-between, tones, which slide up or down, giving a sound that is strange to Western, classically trained ears.

Houston provides background about an instrument and music that might be unfamiliar to readers.

Josefowicz's enduring energy and technique, the controlled orchestral dissonance and extraordinarily equipped percussion section, and the leprechaunesque gyrations of Adams gave the audience an exciting listening and viewing experience.

Houston supports his opinion about the final piece with vivid details.

The conclusion summarizes the general impact of the performance on the audience.

We Cincinnatians are traditionally a conservative people, preferring an orchestra to have a traditionally “full” or lush sound, but Adams composes on the leading crest of the wave of minimalism, a contemporary, spare sound that can make an audience uncomfortable. The concert Saturday night moved the Cincinnati audience a step or two forward.

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