

## CSO's 'Appalachian Spring' is fresh, inspired

Janelle Gelfand | 1:27p.m. EST February 20, 2016



The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra welcomed this weekend's taste of spring with a fresh performance of "Appalachian Spring" and an engaging new violin star.

The all-American program led by Louis Langrée in Music Hall introduced a terrific new American talent, Simone Porter, in the Barber Violin Concerto. The teen violinist stepped in at the last moment for the announced soloist, concertmaster Timothy Lees, who is nursing a stress injury, and delivered a ravishing performance.

Perhaps because she's been playing professionally since age 10, Porter is already a strikingly mature artist at just 19. A student at the Colburn Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles, this rising star already has appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic and many others, and is a recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Her musical gifts were ideal for Barber's lyrical work. Samuel Barber's Concerto of 1939-40 features a nonstop stream of dazzling melody for the violinist in the first two movements. It's not until the finale that the soloist has a chance to put on a real show of virtuosity.

Porter is an elegant player who is not overly emotive, both assets in this piece. From the first note, the big, rapturous sound she produced on her 1745 Guadagnini was something to behold in Music Hall's space. She played consistently with singing tone, beauty of line and expressive phrasing, at times turning to communicate with the orchestra.

The finale was a lightning-quick, and she tossed off its explosive fireworks, smiling all the while. It was an electrifying performance that made you feel lucky to witness.

Langrée was an expert partner, who kept a fairly good balance in this lush, neo-romantic work. Principal oboist Dwight Parry's solo in the second movement was quite moving.

The program's other treat was the orchestra's performance of Aaron Copland's Suite from "Appalachian Spring," a ballet composed for Martha Graham. The piece unfolds as a kind of American tone poem, telling the story of a young, pioneering couple in folk tunes, fiddle dances and the Shaker melody, "Simple Gifts."

Langrée led warmly, and the atmosphere he inspired was memorable, helped by Music Hall's resonant acoustics. He communicated with vivid detail but also breadth, from the sustained, quiet opening through the suite's energized dance sections. The climax on "Simple Gifts" was expansive, with a lively variation for the trumpets and trombones. The closing section, played pianissimo, was quite beautiful.

The spell was broken by Bernstein's Symphonic Suite from the 1954 film "On the Waterfront" (starring Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint). It's an edgy, moody work with the jazzy addition of saxophone and a fantastic drumming section in the opener. Here,

Langrée's direction was taut and driving, and there were many fine contributions from soloists, notably the offstage horn solo by Elizabeth Freimuth.

Listeners in the good-sized crowd were on their feet for a third time.

The evening opened with Charles Ives' quirky "The Unanswered Question," a piece that still, more than a century after Ives wrote it, leaves questions unanswered.