

CHRISTOPH von DOHNÁNYI

CONDUCTOR

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

CLASSICAL REVIEW

Dohnanyi drives CSO

Michael Cameron

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After a week of titanic Bruckner performances with Bernard Haitink, the **Chicago Symphony Orchestra** could be forgiven a minor letdown as it began a long string of concerts with guests at the podium. Maestro Christoph von Dohnanyi and pianist Paul Lewis were on hand Thursday to keep the fires stoked, a task largely accomplished.

Though Lewis has made two Orchestra Hall appearances in recent years, this performance of Mozart's Concerto No. 12 was his CSO debut. It was a reading of exceptional polish, refined legato and delicate coloring. There was little attempt to tease out conflict, but in this relentlessly cheerful work such probity could easily degenerate into overkill. Many pianists find a vein of wit in the finale, but Lewis' restraint ruled the day.

Bartok's "Divertimento for String Orchestra" is also among that composer's least conflicted scores. Dohnanyi's reading was tidy if a bit tepid, classical grace winning out over lean angularity. The ear savored the few moments of genuine intensity, including a mysteriously enigmatic middle movement and a battery of meaty dissonances in the finale.

Schumann's Symphony No. 2 was an unqualified success, affirming Dohnanyi's status as a leading interpreter of the composer's difficult scores. There have been more pliant and glowing performances of this work, but never have I heard it rendered with such unrelenting drive and laser-guided vigor.

The third movement was marked by a pair of searing climaxes, and the scherzo churned infectiously after a muffed opening. But it was the outer movements that stood out for their tensile strength, formal cohesion and elemental urgency.

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