

Cleveland Orchestra makes the most of extra night in Ann Arbor

Zachary Lewis, The Plain Dealer

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View full size Musicians from the Cleveland Orchestra take advantage of an extra night in Ann Arbor by sight-reading chamber music at a local pizza shop. From left, a bass player studying at the University of Michigan, principal oboe Frank Rosenwein and principal flutist Joshua Smith took a turn playing Bach.

ANN ARBOR, MICH. – Orchestra Hall in Chicago it definitely wasn't, but Silvio's Organic Pizza here at the University of Michigan may have been the next best thing Wednesday night.

Inspired to make the most of an unexpectedly free evening, a large group of musicians from the Cleveland Orchestra gave an impromptu concert Wednesday, playing chamber music at a local eatery while patrons nibbled pizza, drank wine, and marveled at a truly rare spectacle.

"It's pretty amazing to walk into a pizza place and have people focused on classical music," said principal flutist Joshua Smith, who helped organize and took part in the event. "It's just a great way of bringing people together."

Originally, when the orchestra's Wednesday concert in Chicago was canceled, many musicians planned to attend a performance here by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. However, that concert, too, was called off.

Then they got word of Classical Revolution. Every Wednesday, they learned, the Ann Arbor branch of the national organization devoted to presenting classical music in unusual settings -- there's a Cleveland group as well -- puts on concerts at Silvio's.

A few phone calls, e-mails, and Facebook posts later, and a panel of players, including concertmaster William Preucil, had agreed to show up and sight-read music alongside Revolution Ann Arbor's usual band of student musicians. Students agreed to bring sheet music, chairs, and stands, and Silvio's provided free pizza and wine.

"This is the only thing happening in town tonight," said Ed Baskerville, head of the local Revolution chapter, amateur cellist, and graduate student in ecology. "This is what it's all about."

Baskerville was among the first group to play. He, another student, violist Joanna Patterson, and concertmaster Preucil kicked off what turned into a long evening by playing movements from Beethoven quartets. "I've never been so nervous to play a quartet in my life," Baskerville said afterward.

More and more players showed up as the night went on, and subsequent performances featured Smith, principal oboe Frank Rosenwein, violinists Jung-Min Amy Lee and Sonja Braaten Molloy, cellists Charles Bernard and Martha Baldwin, basses Charles Carleton and Scott Dixon, and many others. Even music director Franz Welser-Most stopped by for about an hour, to

observe.

Perhaps the most surreal moment came when Pierre-Laurent Aimard, the internationally-renowned pianist touring with the orchestra, showed up to play Brahms on a modest upright piano. He played a challenging work that almost certainly isn't in his current repertoire.

But it wasn't just music and stands the players borrowed from students. Many Cleveland musicians also played on borrowed instruments. That's because most of the larger instruments such as cellos and basses were already in transit to New York, where the orchestra is traveling Thursday ahead of concerts Friday and Saturday.

In short, it was a riotously successful evening. For the Cleveland musicians, it was the perfect use of an evening in limbo, and for the students, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

"This is the best thing that could possibly have happened," Baskerville said.

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