

## Marsalis Concerto Reviews

Wynton Marsalis has been a major figure in music for decades, ranking prominently as a classical and jazz trumpet player. Additionally, he has worked extensively as the music director and arranger of Jazz at Lincoln Center and, not least of all, as a composer. In his new concerto, co-commissioned by the Cleveland Orchestra, the Verbier Festival and the London Symphony Orchestra, he has crafted a large, ambitious piece, a veritable encyclopedia of the trumpet.

It begins with a startling gesture: the trumpeter – the Cleveland Orchestra’s legendary principal Michael Sachs – imitates the sound of nature’s most famous trumpeter, the elephant. The subsequent movement explores fanfares in march form, though the rhythm is often disjointed. The second movement ballad turns more lyrical, pairing the trumpet with the oboe, romantically singing. According to the composer, the third movement, ‘Mexican Son’, addresses the African-Hispanic diaspora, and includes a habanera in 5/4 time. The fourth is a blues movement that pitches the trumpet against the low brass in a call-and-response manner, before drifting into a trance-like closing, the most moving passage of the work.

This huge work (thirty-five minutes!) continues with a fifth movement inspired by the tradition of French trumpet playing, with which Marsalis is connected through his New Orleans roots. The sixth and final movement, the most eventful and mischievous of this eventful and mischievous work, employs dozens of percussion instruments and a whole jungle of instrumental sounds, and it brings the piece back to the elephant trumpet with which it began.

The concerto is dizzying and full of activity, a sort of everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach (including the use of no fewer than seven different kinds of trumpet mutes). It references Marsalis’s musical roots and branches, including New Orleans jazz, bebop, Louis Armstrong, the twentieth-century trumpet concertos of Tomasi and Jolivet, numerous ethnic traditions and more. One hearing is hardly enough to grasp everything going on in such a large canvas, particularly when the general atmosphere is so volatile, with the soloist cast in the role of mythic trickster.

Michael Sachs was fully equal to the role, playing with tremendous stamina (and few breaks) throughout the concerto. Sachs, now in his thirty-fifth season as principal trumpet, is such a masterful player that he could be compelling just playing scales for listeners. Here he was given a cornucopia of ideas to explore and animate, which he did with relish. According to the program notes, Sachs and Marsalis worked closely as the composer developed this piece, and it shows, with Marsalis pushing Sachs to such limits that it effectively stretches the trumpet concerto genre into a whole new world. Cleveland Orchestra music director Franz Welser-Möst kept the teeming orchestral parts closely aligned to Sachs’s solo work, and the piece was received with cheers.

**Seen and Heard International (4/30/2023)**

For 35 minutes, Sachs bewitched the crowd with piercing high notes, clarion outbursts, tight trills, dizzying leaps, and jazzy licks. His and the instrument's versatility were nothing short of astonishing, as was his endurance, and a large collection of mutes along with a bowler hat allowed Sachs to produce an intriguing palette of wavy sounds and expressive effects. Both Sachs and Marsalis fully earned the roaring applause they received.

**Cleveland Plain Dealer (4/28/2023)**

The program continued its exploration of American music with the world premiere of Wynton Marsalis's *Trumpet Concerto*. Written for principal trumpet Michael Sachs, the six-movement, 35-minute work pulls out all the stops by calling for virtually every style of trumpet playing — as well multiple trumpets. It's a daunting task, to be sure, but one that Sachs made look easy. He plays with the confidence that he will never put a foot (or a finger) wrong, with a sound that is adaptable for anything from orchestral excerpts to the blues.

The piece itself proved more interesting in the first half, its declamatory opening "March" experimenting with timbral effect in the winds and percussion. The uneven time signatures of "Mexican Son" required rapid-fire coordination with the front and back of the stage, while the gentler "Ballad" featured the lush quality of a Louis Armstrong jazz standard. The final three movements felt either too short or disjointed, particularly the fourth, where an interesting premise — demonstrating all kinds of mutes, from a cup mute to a bowler hat — became repetitive quickly. Nevertheless, the piece, the performance, and the Orchestra's decision to showcase new music all deserved the warm reception offered by the audience on Thursday.

**ClevelandClassical.com (5/3/2023)**