
Cultural Daily

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Dudamel delivers tension, thunder at Disney Hall

R. Daniel Foster · Thursday, February 1st, 2018

Glockenspiel, octobons, spiral cymbals, temple bowls, vibraphone ... that's a partial list of percussion instruments on display at Walt Disney Concert Hall January 25-28 for the Los Angeles Philharmonic concert "Dudamel Conducts Brahms."

The instruments were present for the world premiere of the concerto *Threshold* by Los Angeles Philharmonic principal timpanist [Joseph Pereira](#). The stage was so crowded with percussion that principals entering and exiting had to execute a cautious traffic pattern to accommodate the array. The mood among the packed house with rapt. Whatever sound was planned had to be extraordinary.

A timely concerto

Pereira was at the mastermind center of the 25-minute work. Six timpani, played in otherworldly ways, were set before him. In composing the piece, Pereira's main influence was the world's deepening gravitas (or lack thereof). "Life has become saturated with tension and anxiety – much like the feeling of this piece," he writes.

Threshold was dense with a taut restlessness, except for a blessed, several-beat rest about one-third of the way through – all the contrast it needed. There were mechanized sub notes: a scrub brush rasped over a bass drum, and stones moved across a formation of ceramic tiles.

Percussionists Tim Palmer and Jason Huxtable ([Maraca2](#)) worked instruments placed at the front. Three additional percussionists were at the rear, sandwiching the orchestra with novelty. A mostly improvised tom-tom / roto-tom solo was striking. Arriving after a build-up of layered sounds, it provoked the question:

Where is all of this heading?

An apt question, given current events mirrored by *Threshold*. In truth, Pereira's work didn't need to head anywhere (although it did), but it was central that the question arose. Even in Walt Disney Hall Concert Hall one does not escape the headlines, or at least their penetrating effect. *Threshold* traveled to a conclusion with glissandos and temple bowls that evoked ritual, and at least a whisper of promise. The ear was left with air – ineffable sound that replenished the space.

Brahms' alternate reality

The evening began with a 5-minute sparkly appetizer: Igor Stravinsky's *Fireworks*. The final piece: Johannes Brahms' *Symphony No. 1*.

In itself, Brahms' masterwork does nothing less than confirm trending theories of multi-dimensional realities. Multiverses, I believe that they're called – the simultaneous, interconnected existence of any possible number of worlds.

Brahms' polyphonous symphony happens all at once, beginning with its ominous launch – an edgy dark blast that locks you in for the ride. The work is all protean intrigue from there, even in the hazier andante. No. 1 delivers an interactive web of sound.

Dudamel's off-the-book direction took the symphony one step further: it placed the audience inside the alternate reality that Brahms deftly created over 14 years labor, beginning in 1854. Dudamel inhabited the music in ways that few accomplish – and merging with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in a kind of otherworldly mind-meld, the conductor and orchestra delivered astonishment.

The coda brought Brahms' heroic thunder, spun into an expanding shockwave by Dudamel's hand. By that time, I was wholly inside one of those alternate worlds.

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