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Organist Paul Jacobs reviewed by Infodad for his performance of Bernd Rihard Deutsch's *Okeanos* with The Cleveland Orchestra and Franz Welser-Möst.

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“And then there is a piece that shows an entirely different side of The Cleveland Orchestra and, in the process, highlights an otherwise little-known element of its history through the performance of an outstanding soloist...it is **Paul Jacobs** who really tells that story – indeed, the story both of the work and of the organ on which he plays it. Jacobs is a remarkable organist, whose technical skill is wedded to profound musical understanding, whose comprehension of Bach is as impressive as his commitment to and elucidation of the works of contemporary composers. *Okeanos* gives him – and the orchestra – a real workout, and for that matter is also something of a workout, a bracing and pleasant one, for the audience. Like Staud, Deutsch calls for a large orchestra with plenty of percussion; also like Staud, Deutsch offers a work that is almost programmatic but never entirely illustrative. The concerto is named for the ancient Greek personification of the world's oceans, but it is not simply about water: it deals with the old notion of “four elements,” the first being water, the second air, the third earth and the fourth fire. This is an excellent organizational structure – one thinks of Nielsen's Symphony No. 2, “The Four Temperaments,” which has an analogous crafting – and Deutsch uses it quite well. His writing for organ is very sensitive, and Jacobs knows exactly how to make it as effective as possible – for instance, when the high-pitched stops are played against piccolos and high percussion, and when soft string stops are heard against orchestral trumpets and trombones. Jacobs has plenty of chances to display his considerable virtuosity – parts of *Okeanos* sound like toccatas with all the stops pulled out, in some cases pretty much literally. But this is far from a straightforward display piece: Jacobs is also required in many places to perform in balance with, rather than aurally in front of, the orchestra, and here too his first-rate musicality and sense of style come to the fore. Interestingly, Welser-Möst also shows himself willing to subsume his strong musical personality into the requirements of Deutsch's work: the orchestra is certainly loud enough when called for, but there is no sense of competition between soloist and ensemble here – rather, Jacobs cooperates with Welser-Möst to produce a whole greater than its constituent parts. That is an ideal approach to this (and many other) concertos.



As for the music of *Okeanos*, it has derivative elements, but from a wide range of sources: it sounds here like film music, there like post-Schoenberg atonality, elsewhere like outright spookiness of the sort for which organs are sometimes (indeed, all too often) employed. What is interesting is the way Deutsch plays with and plays around with these elements, using them – and encouraging Jacobs to use them – in ways that make *Okeanos* sound genuinely new despite its inclusion of material familiar from elsewhere. For example, there are several occasions on which something portentous seems to be going on – until Deutsch suddenly changes the sound, and Jacobs takes listeners in an unexpected direction. Sometimes that direction is an amusing one, as in the first movement, when everything builds and builds and gets more and more dramatic, only to come to a sudden and unexpected full stop that leaves just the sound of chimes and bells behind. The speed of the second movement contrasts well with the slow meandering of the third, while the finale, if not exactly fiery, is witty and speedy and – in Jacobs' hands – thoroughly engaging and involving.

It is for the world première recordings of *Stromab* and *Okeanos*, for the exceptional performance of Paul Jacobs as much as for the consistently high-quality leadership of Franz Welser-Möst, that listeners should seriously consider owning *The Cleveland Orchestra: A New Century*.”