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MUS 1000-04

September 29, 2016

The Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra performed at Illinois Valley Community College on Sunday, September 25. The theme of the concert was “Afternoon in Paris and Vienna,” and contained a total of nine songs. Being my first concert, I was not entirely sure how much I would enjoy the experience, and was pleasantly surprised by how much I did. Soon after my arrival, the lights dimmed and the first song began.

The first piece, “*La Vie Parisienne* Overture on Themes of Offenbach” by Antal Dorati, was a great start to the evening. The tempo was moderately slow, but shifted to a faster speed occasionally. Except for when the flutes played in the forefront, the dynamics were loud and bombastic, with emphasis added from the brass section. Because of these conflicting tempos and dynamics, it led to a very exciting and whimsical peace that very much set the mood for the rest of the concert that would follow.

The following song, the “Herzenseintracht Polka” by Franz von Suppé was, in my opinion, rather bland. The song focused primarily on the strings, as well as the snare drum and triangle for percussion. It was a slow, almost waltz-like sound, with moderately quiet sound most of the time. It was very smooth, and flowed nicely throughout its, rather short, entirety. Despite not liking the song personally, I do appreciate it for what it is, even though it is not exactly to my taste.

I enjoyed the next piece, “Barcarolle,” which was composed by Jaques Offenbach, only a bit more than the previous one. This gentle woodwind and string piece is very slow and gentle, reminiscent of a pleasant breeze. It has a quiet, mezzo piano sound that is very soothing to listen to. While I did not at all dislike this piece of music, I just believe that it was not as enjoyable to experience as what would come after.

Starring in the “Premiere Rhapsody” by Claude Debussy was clarinetist Cory Tiffin. Taking the forefront of the audience’s attention, his skill with his instrument was proven. His control was excellent, producing a wide variety of different sounds depending on the section of the song, which was focused primarily on strings and the aforementioned clarinet. The song had a sort of a sense of mystery about it, perhaps because of the strongly defined sounds of the clarinet. While primarily adagio and mezzo piano, when the song shifted into its other sections it became far more intense, perhaps even reaching forte. This second section also had far more prominent percussion, which added to this newfound intensity. Overall, I enjoyed this piece and its sense of mystery immensely.

The final song in the first half of the concert was Franz Lehár’s “Gold and Silver Waltz.” I was skeptical at first, initially expecting to dislike the waltz compared to how much I enjoyed the previous work. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed it. When compared to the previous pieces it is consistently more fast than them, tending to stay at least moderato. It was also quite medium with its dynamics at most times, occasionally going softer or louder. All sections of the orchestra were quite pronounced, from the flutes to the trombones to the strings. Particular mention goes to the outstanding final section of this song. The percussion built amazing amounts of tension while the brass grew more and more powerful, all to be satisfactorily relieved at the very end. This was definitely a wonderful finale to the first half of the concert.

Coming back from the intermission, the audience was treated to a very fun experience with Johann Strauss Sr.’s “Radetzky March.” Moving at Allegretto and with dynamics that were mezzo forte, this piece felt very different than what came before. It was more powerful and impactful, certainly living up to its title of March. As can be expected, the drums were

pronounced and powerful, as were the woodwinds. What made this piece go from fun to special, however, was the audience joining in and clapping along to the well-defined beat. This was completely unexpected, and a great way to welcome back the audience from the intermission.

Because of how I thoroughly enjoyed the previous waltz, when the “Skaters Waltz” by Emil Waldteufel began I was not at all worried I would dislike it. This waltz was somewhat slower than the previous, possibly closer to andante than moderato. It was, however, similarly mezzo forte. All sections of the orchestra managed to be prominent at different sections of the song. The main section of the waltz focused of string and woodwind, with emphasis and tension coming from the drums. The trumpet in particular was prominent from the brass at times. Much like the previous waltz, the end was greeted by an immensely powerful sections of built up tension and subsequent relief. While not quite as enjoyable as the “Gold and Silver Waltz,” this was still great to hear.

“The Egyptian March,” one again by Johann Strauss Jr., was definitely my favorite piece of the evening. The mood was set immediately by a tapped cymbal or gong, creating a mysterious, foreign feel not heard in the other songs. It is immediately powerful, with striking strings, percussion and brass sounding with full fortissimo. When the song progresses into its second section, which is more upbeat but still dynamic, I was surprised when a small choir joined in to add their voices to the orchestra. Ending with the same sound that started it out, this totally unique and bombastic piece of music was positively wonderful to hear.

Closing the evening was the only piece I had previously heard before, Johann Strauss Jr.’s “Blue Danube Waltz.” While suitable as a closing act, following the enjoyment I got from the previous piece I could not help but feel somewhat let down by this familiar piece. Its gentle, string led sound is slower than the other waltzes, seemingly at adagio or possibly even slower.

While in no way bad, when I compare the fun and excitement of the previous waltzes in particular, I cannot help but find this one slow and far too long.

After the concert ended, I was immediately happy that I had attended. I had never done something like this before, so it was a wholly new experience, and a great one at that. Even my least favorite song, the “Herzenseintracht Polka” was still at least somewhat enjoyable, and my favorites were outstanding to listen to. The orchestra itself was extremely organized and sounded completely smooth and cohesive almost always. It was also great being able to see the instruments that produce such great music being played. Overall, this is certainly something I would do again, and plan to continue doing even after this course has ended.