

MUS 1000: Music Appreciation

Michael Stoens

Professor Pecherek

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It was a pleasant Saturday evening on September Twenty-Eighth. I made my way into the Dr. Mary Margaret Weeg cultural center while the members of the Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra tuned their instruments for the upcoming performance. As the clock struck seven, the lights were dimmed and the musicians prepared to play the first piece.

The Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra kicked off the evening with “The Star-Spangled Banner” composed by John Stafford Smith. The audience rose to their feet in respect. I enjoyed this piece because I have never heard the Star Spangled Banner performed by a full orchestra. My favorite part of this piece was a very powerful brass section near the end which provided me with a very patriotic feeling.

“*A Chorus Line Overture*” was composed by Marvin Hamlisch. This piece began with a curious piano melody that quickly made me interested in where the piece would lead. The string, woodwind, and brass sections quickly joined the piano to create a full and exciting sound. The piece was dynamic, with fast transitions from the full orchestra back to the solo piano as heard in the beginning. Many different instruments and techniques stood out to me in this piece, such as pizzicato on the violin, and prominent use of the harp and xylophone. The piece featured significant amounts of back and forth between the string and brass sections which I really enjoyed. I liked this piece because of the wide variety of styles and energy.

“Another Op’nin, Another Show” was composed by Cole Porter. This was the first song of the evening, featuring soprano vocalist Jennie Judd. I did not like this song as much as the previous pieces because although Jennie Judd did a very nice job, I had been enjoying listening solely to the orchestra and I could not hear much of the instrumental backing over the vocals.

“Highlights from *Show Boat*” was composed by Jerome Kern. Beginning with brass before quickly adding strings and woodwinds, this piece had a very full and moving sound right off the bat. The harp quickly grabbed my attention and provided the piece with happy, yet soothing tone. All four families, with an emphasis on percussion, built on top of one another to a peak before leading the piece into a dynamics change to mezzo piano. Following the change in dynamics was an intriguing segment of pizzicato from the string section and multiple short solo parts from different instrumentalists. There were many aspects I liked about this piece, but my favorite part was the final climax near the end which had highlights of snare drum, cymbals, and harp, on top of the already powerful string, brass, woodwind, and percussion sections.

“The Entertainer” by Scott Joplin opens with an upbeat, energetic and familiar melody. The string, woodwind, brass, and percussion sections quickly faded, leaving only the piano to continue the piece solo. The piano is the heart of the piece, as it creates the famous ragtime melody. Instruments slowly rejoin the solo piano to bring the piece back to the full orchestra. The process of transitioning from solo piano to full orchestra repeated several times, giving the piece a familiar, yet adventurous feeling. My favorite aspect of this piece was how much the percussion section impacted the overall feel of the music: each time the percussion section rejoined the rest of the orchestra after the piano solo, the energy of the piece increased greatly. I realized during the piece just how much the percussion section adds to the orchestra as a whole.

“Embraceable You” by George Gershwin was the second song of the evening to feature Jennie Judd. The song began with strings before becoming mainly vocally focused. Similarly to “Another Op’nin, Another Show” I did not really like this piece because I couldn’t hear the music over the vocals, as well as a general dislike of the tempo and feeling of the piece.

“The Carousel Waltz” by Richard Rodgers began with brass and low bass notes. The piece featured powerful movements by the brass section, and a lot of interaction between the string and brass sections which gave it a fun and playful feeling. Mid way through the piece, the string and brass sections began to collaborate and build on one another followed by a change in dynamics to piano where it slowly began to build again. I enjoyed this piece because the overall theme reminded me of going to carnivals and riding rides when I was younger.

“Glitter and Be Gay” was composed by Leonard Bernstein. Strings and woodwinds create a sad mood behind vocalist Jennie Judd. I was expecting this to be a sad song throughout, so I was taken by surprise when the song took an abrupt change of mood to a happy song; the audience laughed in surprise. The transition from happy to sad repeated multiple times throughout the song. My favorite part of this song was a complicated soprano segment by Jennie Judd, that was then imitated by the orchestra behind her. I really liked the combination of vocals and instruments and enjoyed it much more than the previous songs.

“The March of the Siamese Children” by Richard Rodgers was the first piece to follow intermission. It was conducted by guest conductor, and local optometrist, Dr. Jeffery Blanco. The piece primarily opens with strings and woodwinds with significant strength behind the string section. I was in a performance of *The King and I* many years ago and vividly remember this piece. I liked this piece because it was nice to hear familiar music played by a full orchestra.

The next two songs, “Getting to Know You” and “Tale as Old as Time” came in rapid succession. Both songs featured Jennie Judd on vocals. “Getting to Know You” featured a dramatic brass opening and allegretto tempo. “Tale as Old as Time” featured a mezzo piano

string opening that led into the stunning vocals of Jennie Judd. Both songs were very well done, but I preferred “Tale as Old as Time” because of the beautiful combination of vocals and strings.

“Theme from *Ice Castles*” by Marvin Hamlisch opened with a mezzo forte combination of strings and woodwinds at a moderato tempo. Mid way through the piece, the drums build, cymbals crash, and the brass section comes to life. The addition of the brass section changes the entire mood of the piece. I liked this piece because it conveyed a lot of emotion and felt as if it were telling a story.

“The Way We Were” by Marvin Hamlisch opened with piano and vocals of Jennie Judd. Percussion, brass, woodwind, and string families quickly joined in supporting the vocalist and provided a full sound. I especially noticed the trombone section throughout the piece. When the piece neared its end, all the instruments faded to silence besides the piano, providing an emotional ending that was reminiscent of the very beginning. This piece was well done but the andante tempo and long vocal notes did not suit my taste.

“Selections from *West Side Story*” by Leonard Bernstein opened with the crash of cymbals immediately followed by the rest of the orchestra, creating an incredibly grand sound from the very beginning. The sound of castanets from the percussion section quickly caught my attention. After a short while at a forte and allegretto tempo, a change in dynamics to mezzo piano changed the mood of the piece. A soothing pluck of the harp began a moment of silence throughout the orchestra, which was soon broken by the mezzo piano string section and castanets coming back to life. The piece proceeded to feature highlights of tambourine, maracas, claves and chimes, a trumpet solo, and multiple crescendo and decrescendos throughout that piece. The final crescendo was full of energy and provided a fulfilling close to the piece.

“There’s No Business Like Show Business” by Irving Berlin was the final song of the evening, once again featuring vocalist Jennie Judd. The allegro tempo and forte dynamics filled the room with excitement. The well-known and highly recognizable song provided a proper close to the performance and brought the audience to its feet.

This was the first professional concert I attended and I thoroughly enjoyed it. My favorite piece of the evening would have to be “Selections from *West Side Story*” because of many different kinds of instruments, styles, themes, and emotions throughout the piece. My favorite song featuring Jennie Judd was “Glitter and Be Gay” because I was very impressed with the complicated vocal segments followed by instrumental imitation. Overall I had a nice evening at the concert and will be attending again.