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Mr. Pecherek

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MUS 1000

On the evening of September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra sat poised on the Dr. Mary Margaret Weeg Cultural Center stage dressed in black formalwear ready to perform. The concertmaster walked on stage as the lights dimmed and cued a note from the principal oboe player to which each major section of the orchestra tuned. Once each musician was satisfied with his or her sound, the room fell quiet for a moment before Daniel Sommerville, the conductor, made his appearance. The audience clapped and the orchestra tapped their feet to greet him. Soon after, Paul Butler, the host, was introduced. He explained that this concert would pay tribute to the award-winning composer, Marvin Hamlisch, by featuring four of his pieces along with other popular showtime tunes.

The first piece of this music-filled evening was “A Chorus Line Overture,” composed by Hamlisch. The host explained that *A Chorus Line* has been the longest running musical, winning many awards; it is about the lives and dedication of dancers. The piece started with a playful melody from the clarinet section with pizzicato accompaniment from the string bass section at a moderately slow tempo and quiet dynamic. Moments later, additional sections of the orchestra were added sporadically, increasing in volume and speed until a forte dynamic and moderately fast tempo were reached. There were occasional dynamic contrasts as each featured song was introduced. The first three songs were relatively upbeat and fast paced. Once “What I Did for Love” was reached, the orchestra fell quiet as Anne Badger, the featured pianist, began to play a stunning solo. The homophonic melody featured gorgeous chords and arpeggiated harmonies that were breathtaking. She played so expressively and with emotion, that I am sure everyone in the audience had goosebumps. After the completion of the solo, the rest of the orchestra joined in for a recap of the melody from “One,” to end the piece. The only aspect of the piece that I noticed that could have been bit cleaner and more cohesive were the transitions between each

song. Overall, I thought this choice of literature was a beautiful, very enjoyable, and exciting opener for this concert!

Describing it as “a play within a play,” the host introduced “Another Op’nin’, Another Show” a piece composed by Cole Porter that is from *Kiss Me Kate*. As the orchestra began playing at a fast tempo and forte dynamic, Jennie Judd swept on stage in a beautiful red gown and began to sing. Immediately, the audience could tell that she had great artistry and stage presence, because she danced a bit and used theatric facial expressions while she sang! I thought that the balance between the vocalist and the orchestra was great; neither overpowered the other, and they worked well together. Well done!

Next, the orchestra played “Highlights from Show Boat.” The host stated that *Show Boat* was the first racially integrated musical, and it presented serious issues that were prominent during its time. The piece began with a brief full orchestra introduction, but then went into beautiful, homophonic melody that was played by the cello section. The cellos played this melody with a rich and deep tone that sounded very moving. The other strings accompanied softly accompanied the cellos with harmonies that created a gorgeous, full sound. This piece embodied a dark and serious tone color at first, most likely alluding to the pressing issue of racism that is portrayed in the musical. As the piece continued, it progressed into a major and more upbeat melody. This melody was found mostly within the string section who used pizzicato sounds while being accompanied by the woodwinds and brass who played staccato; this contributed to the new, lighthearted tone color that this piece continued to use until its forte end.

“The Entertainer” is a popular and entertaining rag written by Scott Joplin. The melody is introduced right at the beginning by the whole orchestra, and it started at a relatively slow tempo and quiet dynamic. Over the course of the intro, the tempo increased, and the rest of the piece

was played in a fast, upbeat manner. The instrumentation of this piece was constantly changing to feature different instruments, but especially the piano. After the full orchestra introduction, it changed to solo piano, and Anne Badger played the melody in a very impressive way! After the solo, the melody could be heard from the woodwinds who were accompanied by the strings. For the rest of the piece, the melody kept switching back and forth between the piano and full orchestra. This was a very fun and lighthearted piece that the audience really seemed to enjoy!

Jennie Judd walked out gracefully onto the stage, now to join the orchestra in “Embrace You” by Alan Menken. It began with the strings playing rather soft and at a slow tempo, and they stayed at a piano dynamic throughout the whole piece so that the focus would be on Jennie. She began to sing at a soft volume, but over the course of the piece, she fluctuated back and forth between different dynamic volumes to match the expressive movement of the melody. The melody that she sang was moving; in the middle of the piece, the cellos and violins were featured playing it while she rested. I thought that her voice sounded particularly beautiful on this piece as she had a smooth and silky-sounding tone color. She had great expressiveness, artistry, and a tasteful use of vibrato.

*Carousel*, as described by the host, is considered one of the greatest American musicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After hearing this, the audience grew excited to hear this familiar piece: “The Carousel Waltz from *Carousel*” by Richard Rodgers. The piece began by featuring the flute section playing an interesting melody with many clashing chords and harmonies, which gave it a distinguishing sound from that of the other pieces. It started off at a mezzo piano volume, but the dynamics got increasingly louder as it led from this introduction into to a very beautiful and familiar-sounding melody. The melody was passed around a lot between the different instruments, however it seemed to feature the woodwinds and brass more so than the other pieces

had. Throughout the piece, dynamic usage was very flexible; the orchestra seemed to be using terraced dynamics, which made the rather repetitive melody very exciting to listen to!

“Glitter and Be Gay from *Candide*” featured Jennie Judd again. The orchestra played at a quiet dynamic for most of the time, which made sure to keep the focus on the vocalist. While singing, she acted very theatrical by using facial expressions and hand gestures to suit the dramatic nature of this operatic song. Although this style of singing is not my favorite to listen to, I still appreciated it, because I know that opera is very difficult and takes a great level of skill to sing as well as Jennie Judd did. This piece also featured a solo by the principal violinist, who I thought had beautiful intonation and played in a very expressive and emotional manner.

The orchestra began the second half of the concert by playing “The March of the Siamese Children from *The King and I*” by Richard Rodgers. This piece featured a guest conductor from the community. The piece began with the flutes playing the melody at a mezzo piano dynamic, but it got louder as more of the orchestra was added in. The orchestra played at a moderately quick tempo for the entirety of the time. The melody and piece in total were rather simple and repetitive, but it sounded very cohesive and well put together.

Next, Jennie Judd came on stage to sing “Getting to Know You from *The King and I*” by Richard Rodgers. A very regal-sounding introduction was played by the full orchestra that led up to the vocalist’s entrance. The tone color of the orchestra matched that of her singing voice, which sounded very cheery. The tempo was fast and upbeat, which contributed to the overall happy nature of the piece.

The featured vocalist stayed on stage to sing “Tale as Old as Time from *Beauty and the Beast*” by Alan Menken. She was quietly accompanied by the string section and piano. The piece

was played at a slow tempo, so that the vocalist could really take her time and put feeling and emotion into her singing. Her voice had a very smooth tone and sounded beautiful on this song. The strings and piano did very well at matching the expressivity and emotion in their playing to that of her voice.

“Theme from Ice Castles, Through the Eyes of Love” was written by Marvin Hamlisch. This piece began with a quiet introduction played by the flutes and violins; at first, the intonation between the flutes and violins was questionable, but as the song went on and while more instruments were added, it sounded more stable and in tune. A very nice melody was presented by the violins who were accompanied by strong harmonies from the lower strings, brass and woodwinds. A constant, repeated rhythm was played by the percussion through much of the piece. Later, the melody was passed from the violins to the lower voices of the orchestra, which I thought sounded particularly rich and full. It was nice to hear the contrast between the two register of voices.

The Academy Award and Grammy winner, “The Way We Were” by Marvin Hamlisch, was introduced by the Host. He told the story of how after Barbara Streisand performed this song, she described Hamlisch as not only an amazing composer, but a great friend. The beautiful song started quietly with just the piano and Jennie Judd. The dynamic level increased a bit as different orchestra members were added, but the slow tempo remained the same for the entire song. The moving melody stayed with Jennie Judd the whole time as the rest of the orchestra accompanied with gorgeous harmonies. There was a great balance and unification between the vocalist and the orchestra; they were very expressive as they moved together. The emotional sound of the singing and playing matched the sad, yet beautiful, and reminiscent lyrics. She sang with such passion and emotion that I think the whole audience felt moved after hearing this

piece. At its conclusion, Jennie Judd was presented with a bouquet of flowers and received great audience appraisal.

“Selections from West Side Story” by Leonard Bernstein was a showstopping piece that began boldly at a fortissimo dynamic. The transitions between each song in this piece were great and very clean. Each of the featured songs from this musical had different and unique styles and sounds. The orchestra displayed a variety of different tempos and dynamic levels that kept the audience engaged and excited over the course of the whole piece. “One Hand, One Heart” stood out to me, because unlike most of the other songs within this piece that were lively and upbeat, it was slow and lyrical; it featured the string section who played in a beautiful, expressive way. The strings played with a rich tone color, at a very slow tempo, and the dynamics swelled and flowed perfectly as they moved through the melody. “Cool,” the song that followed, was a great contrast. I found it to be super fun to listen to, because of the lighthearted rhythm, snapping, and hi-hat. Once the whole piece was finished, the entire orchestra stood to be recognized as the crowd cheered loudly. Amazing job!

The Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra and Jennie Judd closed the concert with the flashy and fast-paced piece “There’s No Business Like Show Business” by Irving Berlin. At its conclusion, the orchestra, featured soloists and speakers received a standing ovation! After the ending of the concert, I took some time to think about some of my favorite moments from the evening. The piano solo “What I Did for Love” played in “A Chorus Line Overture” stood out to me. I always love listening to Anne Badger play, and I thought the solo was beautiful and moving; The song spoke to me so much that now I want to learn it myself on the piano! My favorite song that featured the vocalist was “The Way We Were,” because it was also very expressive, and she sang it very passionately. I love slow songs that have expressive melodies

and beautiful harmonies. My favorite piece overall was “Selections from West Side Story,” because of its great contrasts of different tempos, dynamics, and styles, which made it a very exciting piece to listen to. In closing, I thought that this lighthearted and energetic concert was very enjoyable and well done; I am glad that I attended!