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Concert Review--Family Pops

I thought to myself as I was walking into Illinois Valley Community College on September 22nd, "Why am I at school on a Saturday night?" But then I remembered how excited I was to see the Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra perform their *Family Pops: An Evening of Disney Magic and More*. The guest conductor for this performance was Danko Drusko. Danko is originally from Germany but is currently at Northern Illinois University as the Visiting Assistant Professor and Director of the Hoosier Philharmonic. For this event I decided to bring my little sister and my boyfriend to enjoy a night full of live symphony orchestra music. We gave our tickets to the ticket collector and found ourselves some seats very close to the front so we were sure to not miss anything. This specific concert consisted of music from very famous movies like *007* and *The Pirates of the Caribbean* to Disney movies and musicals like *The Little Mermaid* and *The Wizard of Oz*. The IVSO managed to incorporate music for all ages, which I loved. When I sat down in my seat I observed everything I could. Not only because this was my first orchestra I'd been to but because I was sincerely intrigued by everything there was to offer at this concert.

It was nearing 7 o'clock and the IVSO was getting ready to perform. They started the concert out with four themes from *007*, James Bond Films. Their first piece was *The James Bond Theme* which started out with very strong and familiar trumpets to which the audience could make out what this piece was. This specific piece started off rather soft and once it got to the main portion of the piece all of the brass instruments came together homophonically. The musical cohesion of this segment was astounding, to say the least. Everything flowed together so nicely and you can tell that this group spends a lot of time on perfecting every piece. Next was *For Your Eyes Only* and it starts off with

the woodwinds playing very softly. This piece is rather slow and calming and it had to of been one of my favorites. I could distinctly hear each group playing whether it be the flutes playing the melody of the song or the cymbals being played every so often. The tempo within the orchestra sped up towards the middle of the piece and you can tell where the primary focal point of the piece is. I would assume that it is played in a major key because it doesn't necessarily sound dark and gloomy to me but more happy and rather slow for the most part. The next piece, *Live and Let Die*, started off with a homophonic texture from the violins, cellos and violas. As the piece progresses the trumpets speed up to the primary focal point. The dynamics and tempo changed rather often from very soft and medium slow to very loud and very fast. This is another piece that I enjoyed when I didn't think I was going to. When I first saw that the orchestra was playing songs from 007 I was secretly just waiting to hear the disney tunes. But, I enjoyed them a lot more than I thought I would and I'm glad I gave them a chance.

The next piece was titled, *Goldfinger*, and there was something special about this one. For this bit of music the audience had the pleasure of listening to someone physically sing the lyrics to this song. This piece started off very strong and loud with the continuous hitting of the bass drum. I think the melody was rather elaborate in that I hear the trumpets one second and the next I'm hearing the cymbals. I feel like I could listen to what was being played and then each time hear some different instrument. Ameena Maria Khawaja was the vocalist for this piece and her voice was absolutely amazing. Ameena is from California and has a degree in Cello Performance from Cal State University. I think when she sang the chorus of this piece it really just brought

everything together and made it sound that much better. Her vibrato was breathtaking in that she could hit notes that I couldn't ever imagine being able to hit.

The third piece to be played was *Moon River* from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. I loved the soft start to this piece played by the strings homophonically. I can't stress enough how beautifully simple this melody was. I felt as though all I did during this piece is relax and smile. I saw this piece a week ago so I'm not certain that the harp was played but I am almost positive that it was. I love the sweet sound that the harp gives off as it's being strummed because that too is just simple. This was also one of my favorite pieces and I have honestly listened to it several times since the concert courtesy of youtube.

Next, the IVSO played *The Muppet Medley*. When they first started playing it brought back so many memories from when I was younger and knew the Muppets very well. The dynamics start off very strong, the harmony seems rather simple and the rhythm was played steadily as it should be. The dynamics and tempo throughout the entire medley was all over the place. Sometimes it was soft and slow and other times it was fast and loud with the help of the brass instruments. When they're quiet that is mostly the strings job to hold very soft and quiet notes. Again, I loved this Medley because it brought me back to my younger days and I was able to share that with my younger sister. I loved it.

Next, the IVSO played *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. This piece's dynamics started off slow and sped up rather fast with the help from the string family. I liked that I could picture the movie playing as I was listening to the orchestra play. I think that the rhythm is fairly complex in that it is always changing and doesn't stay the same for very long. If you can't tell already, I absolutely adore the string

section and I was in a complete trance being able to see them perform live. This music would be considered 20th century music in that that specific movie was made in 2003.

*Cinema Paradiso* was played next in the IVSO concert. This piece calmly starts off with the piano in a very sweet melody played strictly monophonically. I always wished that I could've learned to play the piano when I was younger. As the piece goes on the strings join in with the piano, still very soft with a medium fast tempo. This piece really worked for me because I am much more into soft pieces where flutes, strings and pianos are played. This was such an amazing piece that I'm so glad I got to hear live.

The last section of music before the intermission was music from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. This piece had a very strong and loud start to it, incorporating the whole orchestra. Unlike any other piece I heard this one had a gong in it which was a nice surprise. I think the tempo, dynamics and rhythm was very drastic throughout the entire thing because one minute it's slow and not many instruments are playing and then every instrument is involved making everything much louder and faster. This would be considered a 20th century piece as well because the Lord of the Rings movies were made in the 2000's.

The next section of music was composed of Disney music and musicals. The first Disney piece was music from the movie *Frozen*. The tempo starts off very fast with the help of strings. I think the melody of these pieces are rather simple because they are aimed for enjoyment by children and if they weren't simple then it wouldn't be from a Disney movie. I liked how in *Do You Want to Build a Snowman* the dynamics are very soft and slow from the help of the flutes, strings and piano. It sounded as though the

snare drum might've been a part of this piece too. The transition between songs was rather smooth and I like that aspect of it, it sounded awesome!

The next song that was played was *Colors of the Wind* from Pocahontas. This song in general had always been a favorite of mine. When I was listening to it I couldn't help but hum along. The strings did a great job in harmonizing the tune. This too had Ameena Khawaja's help in singing the lyrics to this song which brought it all together and made the experience that much better. Her voice is so beautiful in that she kept a beautifully steady rhythm throughout it. The dynamics changed throughout stayed slow for the majority of this piece. *The Colors of the Wind* would be considered a 20th century piece of music because this Disney movie was made in 1995.

The Little Mermaid's, *Part of Your World*, was played next. I must add that this is my sisters favorite Disney movie when she was a kid so I watched this a lot when I was younger. This piece started off with the tempo at a medium fast with the help from the flute section. The brass section did an amazing job homophonically playing the primary part of this musical composition. I loved how the whole orchestra came together at one point and how the cymbals made everything sound much more magical.

Sleeping Beauty's, *Waltz*, was played next. The start to this piece was very abrupt and I was not expecting it to be that loud. But, once the orchestra played the introduction it slowed down some and they continued to keep a steady rhythm throughout the entire piece of music. The musicianship of this piece really shows how well the IVSO connects with each other in making a beautiful piece of music sound even more appreciable live.

Next up was from *Beauty and the Beast* and it was called *How Does A Moment Last Forever*. *Beauty and the Beast* is my all time favorite Disney movie by far. I usually watch the Netflix version as I'm falling asleep every night. So as you can tell, I was looking forward to this piece all night. It started with a beautiful accompaniment from the string section monophonically. As the piece continued the tempo sped up but the way that the IVSO was able to steadily keep the rhythm throughout the entire piece was impeccable. It seemed that the strings were the main section to complete this piece of music and I loved in the end how just one person was playing. I might add that I got chills several times while listening to this.

*Over the Rainbow* was the next beautifully played piece from the musical, *The Wizard of Oz*. I thought that the start to this piece was rather slow and it took me a while to find a part in the song where I could hum the tune. As it continued I was definitely able to decipher where they were at and I thought of the lyrics in my head. I personally like when the orchestra comes together and everyone's playing their part to make the piece sound how it does. The harmony was fairly complex because it changed a lot throughout. I'm also a big fan of this movie so I loved this piece.

Last but not least *Defying Gravity* from *Wicked* was played as an amazing finale. In the beginning of this piece I think was the first time I heard the trombones actually play their very low sound. Ameena Khawaja made this musical composition sound breathtaking with her beautifully long held notes. The rhythm was steady and simple all through this composition. If I really listened to it I could make out what the rhythm was and it didn't change.

In conclusion, I wouldn't have wanted to attend any other concert as my first because this was the most amazing thing I think I've ever encountered via live entertainment. I was in complete awe the whole time because I've never heard instruments like that live before. I think it helped that I knew most of the pieces that they were playing so it made it more enjoyable. My night was so magical thanks to the Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra. Thank you for doing what you do for the IVSO because you guys are truly incredible.