

Young Performers and Dvorak Concert Review

by

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Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 was the perfect day to attend Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra's Young Performers and Dvorak event in downtown Ottawa, IL. The performance showcased two very talented young musicians skilled in playing the flute and Dvorak's Symphony No. 8 in G Major. Upon entering the auditorium and sitting the second row, I was filled with excitement and anticipation as I watched the some of the musicians take the stage. The eagerness of the crowd was prominent, and I awaited readily for the first notes of the concert.

The initial piece of music performed was entitled *Meditation on the Old Bohemian St. Wenceslaus Choral, Op. 35* and was written by Josef Suk, an understudy of Dvorak. This song was performed by only the string musicians and was a lovely opening for the rest of the afternoon. The beginning of the song was played softly, with a simple melody throughout the various instruments and set in duple meter. Imitation could be heard at the start, with the double bass playing pizzicato; the bass was then joined a while later by the cellos also using the pizzicato technique to add interest. The dynamics varied throughout the song from soft and light, to mezzo forte, and by the conclusion of the song, had shifted to pianissimo, with graceful final notes. The tempo was andante but kept the audience captivated throughout its entirety. The harmony was rather simple and built in complexity as the song progressed. It accented the melody beautifully, which was moving mainly in steps rather than leaps throughout the whole song. Contrasting with the deep, dark harmonies, the melody was also played primarily on the higher strings, giving the song a striking sound. The musicians performed this piece with focus and beautiful intonation, making it both pleasurable to listen to and watch being performed.

One of the highlights of the concert was a young flutist, Aubrey Garretson. She was featured playing a piece from the composer, Ernesto Kohler, named the *Papillon*, which means

Butterfly. This beautiful tune began with a soft, repetitive beginning played on the string instruments; eventually, the flute began with a precise, lilting sound. Each note was distinct and clear, standing out in the homophonic texture. Performed with vivace and an allegro tempo, the trilling, elaborate melody was reminiscent of butterflies and dragonflies buzzing around a blue lake, weaving in and out of the surrounding weeds. It was played with a steady rhythm in duple meter, with many leaps, and fast, running notes in the melody. The flutist was dressed beautifully in a dark magenta dress, and one could see and hear through her composure and skill that she possessed great talent. This all added to her artistry in her performance along with precise intonation and beautiful projection from her instrument. She performed with grace and style along with the other musicians, and the overall sound of the players melded together perfectly.

Moments after Aubrey had performed and the audience finished applauding, the next artist was presented. Jessica Znaniecki stepped forth in a sparkling, lavender dress and smiled at the audience as she waited to present her musical talents on the next piece, entitled *Hypnosis*. This song was one of my personal favorites from the program; it reminded me of an enchanting, magical forest with crystal waterfalls and exotic flowers across the forest floor. The song started with a harp being plucked to produce mystical sounds, which was then met by the rest of the strings responding with dark, somber tones. The melody started slowly with long notes scattered with trills and riffs, and soon its tone elevated, giving it a hopeful sound. The overall tempo of the song was adagio but contained many phrases with fast runs and leaps. The texture was homophonic with a steady rhythm and a crescendo in the dynamics from mezzo piano to mezzo forte throughout the song. Chimes added to the graceful and delicate harmony which in turn complimented the sustained melody with its intricate embellishments. The rhythm and beat were

steady until the ritardando at the end, completing *Hypnosis*. The musician played with good balance and intonation, and her style and enjoyment of the piece was evident through her performance and in the way that she physically presented the piece.

Once she had finished, the rest of the Illinois Valley Symphony Orchestra took the stage and began their presentation of the First Movement of Dvorak's *Symphony No. 8 in G Major*. The beginning, set in a minor key was played by the cellos, woodwinds and brass; this set the mood between the instruments and the melody. The First Movement started in piano, with the instruments softly playing, but built in excitement and the dynamics increased to forte. The percussion at this point was prominent in the song but did not overtake the melody. With a homophonic texture, the full orchestra was playing, and they key had changed to major. The rhythm was steady, the harmonies complex, and the melody repetitive. The dynamics changed during the song, going back and forth from forte to fortissimo, and occasionally dropping to mezzo piano. This created contrast and interest in the sound, giving feelings of climactic events, which built the intensity of the song. The melody could be heard played gently by the violins and the flutes, and quite contrary to this was the brass and percussion which matched each other with bombastic sounds. The piece closed with an ending in fortissimo and the full orchestra playing with vigor.

The Second Movement then started after a round of enthusiastic applause. This movement commenced with solemn notes on the strings and soft, warm sounds from the wind instruments. Set in a minor key, the texture was homophonic and simple in both melody and harmony. There were three melodies presented in this piece, and the form would be described as free rondo. The melody is clearly the primary focus of the song, with a fairly steady rhythm and varied dynamics. Eventually, the full orchestra played together in a triumphant manner and the

sounds melded together perfectly. The musicians exhibited excellent poise, projection, and intense concentration whilst playing with each other, and it was captivating to watch them as they performed. The simplistic style of the melody and harmony heard in the beginning had transformed throughout the song into more complex variations of the melody, as more action was heard in the percussion and between the instruments. The song concluded with a soft ending; a singular sustained note finalized this song which pleased all those listening.

The next movement was played in a style which enchanted the audience with its waltz rhythm. Mezzo forte dynamics made this song easy to hear and allegretto tempo made it pleasant to listen to and feel. The rhythm was lilting, inspiring one with the want to dance right along with the sounds from the performing musicians. This song exhibited a relaxing and warm sound whilst maintaining an eagerness and variety for the listener. The musicians played the song masterfully, smoothly transitioning from section to section, and contrasting long notes with shorter ones; the cellos and bass occasionally added texture and variety by using the pizzicato technique and more of a staccato rhythm was also added sporadically in the strings and woodwinds. Overall, through the use of these various techniques, the song was presented with beautiful style and artistry. Each musician had ample projection and was cohesive with each other. The melody was the primary focal point of this song and the texture was homophonic. This number included themes which were very busy, moving mainly in steps. I enjoyed this song immensely; it seemed to have a delicate yet strong quality which was attractive to the ear of all those listening.

The Fourth Movement and final piece for this concert began triumphantly, with loud fanfare announced by the trumpets. Cellos are the main instruments which present the melody, which is then repeated in many different variations. This song possessed a jubilant and joyful

sound in homophonic texture and with a steady rhythm. After the loud sounds of the trumpets, the woodwinds and strings then softly take the lead. Shortly after, the trumpets begin once again with jubilation and a full orchestra. The dynamics are loud and vibrant, with repetitive, fast notes on the strings and enthusiastic percussion and brass. After this energetic section, the dynamics start again to soften as this begins what the audience may perceive as an ending, with soft, relaxing music which “slows to a slumber-like quality”, as stated in the program. However, this is not the end of the Symphony, as the song is again lifted to end the piece with fortissimo dynamics, vivacity, and energy. Intensity and concentration was evident on the faces of all those performing, and each played with skill and precision. The fourth movement ended with a thrill that surely couldn’t have been matched by any of the other pieces performed, and I thoroughly enjoyed this part of the Symphony and thought it a fitting ending for an exciting afternoon.

The performance from the Illinois Valley Symphony and the young flutists was both lovely and entertaining for everybody who attended. All those who participated in hosting the event and performing were wonderful, with bright, happy energy and astounding talent. The selection of music suited the event, matching the enthusiasm felt through those present. Likewise, the day was matched perfectly to the music; it was wonderful, warm, and bright, similar to the pieces played by the Orchestra. I enjoyed the afternoon watching as these musicians all ardently exhibited their artistry for the audience to hear and see, and I thought the selection and execution of the pieces were mastered beautifully with a style, passion and grace which delighted the listener.