

MUSIC: Concert reviews

Philharmonic delivers grand night of singing: “This Can’t Be Love... A Broadway Valentine”

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NEWS CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

Concert Review

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

Updated: February 13, 2011, 6:30 AM

How is this for a Valentine’s Day victory:

It has been way too long, you have to figure, since anyone sang “Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life,” on the stage of Kleinhans Music Hall.

Saturday night, we made up for this slight. “Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life” was sung simultaneously by three eminent Broadway singers: Ron Bohmer, who recently starred in Disney’s “High School Musical”; Tamra Hayden, who was Cosette in “Les Misérables” forever; and Craig Schulman, who played Jean Valjean in “Les Mis” almost 2,000 times.

They belted the over-the-top Victor Herbert chestnut with gusto, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra going full-tilt behind them.

The song immediately followed the beautiful “When the Children Are Asleep,” from “Carousel,” which already had melted everyone into a puddle.

Talk about a spectacular ending!

It was the culmination of an evening of love songs. The orchestra had only one solo: a bright performance to the overture to Cole Porter’s “Kiss Me Kate,” which opened the evening.

Bohmer, Hayden and Schulman all have big voices and fine style. They began almost tentatively, with Rodgers and Hart’s “This Can’t Be Love” and “There Is Nothing Like a Dame,” which I guess is a sort of love song.

Then Bohmer boomed forth with “Some Enchanted Evening,” and we were on our way.

Bohmer is not your conventional barrel-voiced baritone. He gave the “South Pacific” showpiece a twist by alternating his big booming tones with something kinder and gentler. He used this technique also with “If Ever I Would Leave You.”

He is a pro, and so is Schulman, whose tenor virtuosity was the highlight of the night. I never have heard anyone sing “Night and Day” the way Schulman did, passionately and operatically. He went for broke, and it was thrilling.

Planted on stage, his hand in his pocket, Schulman has the kind of confidence that I suspect can come only from having played Jean Valjean a million times. He also warbled another song we do not hear nearly enough: “Stranger in Paradise,” from “Kismet.” It was a show-stopper.

“Baby, It’s Cold Outside” gave Hayden a chance to shine, and the rest of us a chance to extend our holiday season somewhat. Why not have songs about snow, with the Powder Keg Festival going on this weekend? Hayden gets credit for being on stage almost constantly, singing duets and trios. She strutted her way through a cute “My Heart Belongs to Daddy” and hit the high notes admirably in “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man.”

Conductor Matthew Kraemer kept things moving, and the big crowd seemed happy. The concert seemed to get better as it went on — maybe the singers were warming up, maybe it was simply that a lot of the unabashed romantic songs I crave were saved for the second half. My one complaint is that a few of the numbers — I am thinking especially of “People Will Say We’re in Love”—were too fast. Slow down, let’s enjoy this.

“If I Loved You,” “Almost Like Being in Love,” “With a Song in My Heart”—I could listen to this all night.

All three singers joined forces for great takes on “It’s a Grand Night for Singing” and a very entertaining “Get Me To The Church On Time.”

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

“A Broadway Valentine” with conductor Matthew Kraemer. Part of the Pops Series. Saturday in the Kleinhans Music Hall.