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PACO End of Season Concert

There is bustling excitement in the Cubberly Theater. It is the last concert of the season for Senior PACO and expectations are high, as the program promises to be a lengthy, difficult set of repertoire. Tonight, PACO is playing the Concerto for Four Violins by Vivaldi, Langsamer Satz by Webern, Suites for Cello and String Orchestra by Harrison, Allegro Appassionato by Saint-Saens, and String Symphony No. 2 in D Major by Mendelssohn. In addition, two string quartets and a violin viola duo will perform various chamber works, such as Ludwig Spohr's Duo for Violin and Viola. This concert closes out Senior PACO's 2016-2017 season, and marks its 51st anniversary. PACO was founded by William Whitson in the late 1960s, and has gone on to perform around the globe on various tours. They are headed by Ben Simon, the conductor and director of the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, and former director of the Crowden School in Berkeley.

They began with the Vivaldi Four Violins Concerto. Immediately, the togetherness of the soloists and orchestra stood out, and lasted throughout the entire piece. There was a pleasant lightness in the orchestral accompaniment, and the soloists worked well to weave the melodies together. Although the soloists lacked the light, mischievous energy needed to perform this piece, they played gracefully and were extremely aware of each other's rhythms and harmonies, particularly in the second movement, where the first soloist played quieter in order to let the melody of the second soloist to shine through. Overall, the Vivaldi was a pleasant beginning to a lengthy concert.

Next, they played the Webern. The first violins came in a bit weak, but the celli and bass covered it up with a strong bassy note. Surprisingly, when the viola section solo came, the violas had a strong presence on stage. There were near perfect shifts in mood, from fervent tremolos and vibrato, to eerily tranquil snippets with no vibrato at all. However, there were slightly counting issues within the violins, as they were not together in the high sections. The high notes came out a bit strained, but a fine musical performance overall.

After the Webern, the orchestra was given a quick break when the chamber music groups came on. The first quartet was String Quartet in E-flat major by Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel. There was a strong cue from the first violin, who continued to lead the quartet well throughout the piece. The harmonies of the second violin helped support the first violinist very well, and all the quartet members did well to provide a solid foundation which the first violinist could soar over. The pulses were nice, and the sounds blended extremely well. A solid quartet.

Then came the Webern Duo for Violin and Viola. The two musicians came in strong, yet the duo began to fall apart. There was a good balance between the violin and viola, yet the shriller sound of the violin did not mix with the richer fuller sound of the viola. The notes themselves were quite good and the intonation was spot on. However, they had several togetherness issues, and needed to be more aware of each other's melodies or harmonies. Overall, the duo could use some more eye contact and discussion over the passing of the melody.

The last quartet to perform in that night was the String Quartet No 1 in G minor by Edvard Grieg. The quartet had a wide color palette and worked well with each other to create a haunting atmosphere and explosive entrances. The viola was loud in the necessary spots - the musicians were clearly aware of each other's lines and shifted their own dynamics accordingly. There was a charged, positive energy in the

music, and the dynamics themselves were well done. It provided a spectacular finish to the chamber music program.

After intermission, PACO began with the Lou Harrison Cello Suites. The cello soloist always had a prominent presence in the piece, and gave a wonderful nostalgic feeling to the piece overall. The cello section overall did a great job of supporting the dialogue between the soloist and the violins.

Then the cello soloist came back to perform the Saint-Saens with the orchestra. There was excellent articulation by soloist Eric Gaenslen, and he produced a full, rich tone from his cello. The celli pizzes were well done and together, and helped add to the overall mood of the piece. However, the first violins could be softer and sometimes the soloist was difficult to hear. All in all, the soloist and the orchestra maintained a nice balance, which allowed the soloist to create musical expression through his own liberty.

Finally, the Mendelssohn marked the end of the concert. Other performers from the lower Sinfonia and Debut orchestras flocked onstage to participate in a large scale performance of the Mendelssohn. The orchestra itself was together; however, several intonation and bowing issues detracted from the performance. The articulation was excellent and there was always positive energy from the orchestra. It was a memorable way to finish off the night.

The group had excellent stage presence and looked very professional. Overall I would go to see them again as they handled things in a professional manner and gave solid performances of all their repertoire. I would rate this performance an eight out of ten because of several intonation issues, but it was a solid performance nevertheless.

* As all PACO concerts are free admission, I was unable to procure a ticket stub.

Semester 2 Performance Review: San Francisco Ballet Symphony

For my second performance, I heard Sergei Prokofiev's *Cinderella* Ballet, performed by the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra. The orchestra performed in the San Francisco Ballet Hall, which is a large and graciously decorated hall lined generously with seats. The orchestra played in a pit below the stage. It was not under the stage and was visible to the audience, but located on a lower level than the main stage. The Orchestra performed on Sunday, May 7th, at two in the afternoon. This was the last day that they would be playing the Cinderella ballet. My first impression on the orchestra was the impression that they are a highly skilled group of musicians, and that the music they would be playing was well rehearsed. This impression was given by their formal dress and manner. The performers all wore black, and there were very few, if any musicians, that strayed from the dress code. They entered the orchestra pit in an orderly manner, from doors coming from the side of the stage, and took their seats promptly. They didn't warm up on stage for long, and their tuning note was precise and not overly lengthy. Coming into the performance, I knew no background information about the orchestra, but before the performance and during intermission I read background information from the program. The ballet orchestra has been playing for more than 40 years, and has won a number of Grammy Awards. They have a regular group of forty nine musicians, but when necessary expands to sixty five players. They have performed a variety of music, and recently played at a fortieth anniversary concert at Herbst theatre last year in March. The orchestra's music director and conductor is Martin West, and they feature a guest conductor, Matthew Rowe. The hall was packed, and the audience consisted of a variety. There were people of all ages that came from many different places. The overall attitude was formal, and the majority of the audience was wearing formal wear.

The Orchestra was playing Sergei Prokofiev's *Cinderella*. It consisted of three parts, which followed the traditional story of Cinderella, performed by the ballet. I particularly enjoyed the first scene of the first act, as it had a mystical and eerie tone that seemed to foreshadow later events. It began with the strings, which started with a melancholy note. They continued for a couple of long notes, until the woodwinds and then the brass joined in. They repeated the original melody from the strings, gently crescendoing, until they reached a mezzo forte. At that point, the upper woodwinds broke off into a separate melody. They didn't seem to match the mood of the rest of the orchestra, as they played a slightly more accelerated and upbeat melody. They were soon overcome again by the strings, which continued to crescendo their melody. Periodically sections of the orchestra would break off into a new melody, but the orchestra seemed to carry a prominently slow and melancholy melody the entire scene through. The scene had very particular phrasing and dynamics, as the music seemed to swell and shrink smoothly but rapidly throughout the entire scene. Each instrument had the melody at least once, resulting in a well balanced sound. The dynamics and phrasing were very precise and exact, and the orchestra crescendoed and decrescendoed in perfect unison. In addition, each instrument seemed to know it's part in the scene. There were times when a certain section stood out more than the rest, and the whole orchestra would decrescendo to allow that instrument to carry the melody, but would fall back into place when appropriate. The orchestra adapted to numerous moods throughout the scene, but a gloomy, melancholy, and slightly foreshadowing theme seemed to persist. I also enjoyed the second act, which had only one scene. It had a more upbeat, accelerated tone, and was a welcomed contrast to the gray feel of the ballet. The second act featured less swells and decrescendos. The dynamics were more sudden and prominent. The orchestra would crescendo suddenly, from a piano to a fortissimo, and after a couple

beats or measures, they would suddenly decrescendo to a pianissimo. They also played at a faster tempo than before, giving the piece a more upbeat and joyful tone. However at certain times, the piece took on an almost rushed or hurried tone, while other times it would slow down. This typically didn't last very long, as the orchestra would quickly return to their original relaxed tempo. Certain instruments stood out at certain times, but there was not one instrument that played more than others, and all the instruments were featured equally. The performers exited the stage through doors in the side of the main stage in a prompt and orderly manner. It seemed that the conductor gave evident and clear direction to the orchestra in regard to both tempo and dynamics, as the orchestra was very well coordinated. The scenes and acts transitioned smoothly. The musicians seemed to enjoy their performance, and played with with lots of emotion and musicality.

My overall impression of the performance was that the musicians were skilled and that their music was well rehearsed. The musicians had high levels of professionalism, both in their music and in their behavior. They played with excellent dynamics and phrasing, and were very well coordinated. The musicians performed with clarity and the program was somewhat informative so I was not left with any questions about the performance or music. I would definitely see this group again, as they played well, and I enjoyed their music a lot and had a great time at the performance. I would rate the performance very well, as musicians performed wonderfully, and their music was smooth and well rehearsed, in addition to being fun to listen to.



Here is a
character from
the ballet that I
cut out from the
program



Performance Review #2

Soothing Music

On Sunday January 15, I went to the San Francisco Symphony, which played Mahler's songs, consisting of *Blumine* (1884), *Song of a Wayfarer* (1884/1896) and *Das klagende Lied* (1880). The performance took place in the Davis Symphony Hall, which is shaped in a semi-circle. There are five levels of seating for the audience; orchestra, Terrace, Loge, First Tier and Second Tier. I sat with my family in the loge level. I especially enjoyed that seating because my family and I had a view from the right side of the orchestra, facing towards the violins. The lighting was created by large chandeliers, which were positioned high on the ceiling. The seats were purple and comfortable and the whole effect was glamorous. The musicians walked in dressed in formal attire--women in long black gowns and men in tuxedos. They looked confident and proud. I sat in the audience with my whole family, waiting impatiently for the performance to begin.

The afternoon began with the first piece from Mahler's songs, *Blumine*. The piece is delicate, and its soft tone symbolizes the dawning of the day when soft light emerges into the darkness of the night. In the beginning, there is a bright sound of trumpet solo. In addition, a delicate flute solo follows it, while the violin section plays several tremolos in the duration of the piece. The focus of this piece was on the woodwinds and the brass section, especially the flute and the trumpet. In this piece, the dynamics were steady and the violin section did not dominate the orchestra as usual. After few intense measures towards the end of this piece, the piece resolved back into a soft mood. My favorite piece was the second piece, *Song of a Wayfarer* (1884/1896). This piece was mainly focused on the opera solo singer, Sasha Cooke. While she played throughout the piece, the orchestra made accompaniments and showed intense measures of dynamics. Sasha Cooke throughout the piece showed a musical visual, such as fast and swift as a wind blows. In addition to the singer, the concertmaster, Alexander Barantchik played a solo in several parts in the piece. I liked this piece because I play the violin and his performance was technically and emotionally extraordinary. The whole audience became enraptured with him and his music. For example, for him, the double-stops, which are extremely difficult to perform, appeared unchallenging. He moved from one to the next at an incredible speed, creating an intensity that he was able to sustain throughout the long piece. His flawless virtuosic technical skills created a warlike tone to the piece. The following piece was yet more intense as it rendered both storm and war imagery. The last piece was *Das klagende Lied* (1880). This piece consisted of three major parts: *Wakdamarchen*, *Der Spielmann* and *Hochzeitsstück*. There was four of the San Francisco Choir that played. This piece made me feel very emotional and as well seemed as if I was watching a play or a movie. I especially loved the singers acting and the accompaniment by the four dancers. In the piece, there consists of times that were intense and times that were lovely. The first movement drove the piece to move intensely. As the story is told, there are two brothers that are looking for a certain flower that the queen is wanting in order for one of them to be her king. This movement seemed as if it was a

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competition. The ending was dramatic; one of the brothers kills the other. This was expressed by the singer's intense dynamics and emotions. In addition, the second movement was somewhat scary because the remaining brother decides to find the queen after his murder. The dynamics continued to grow and the dancers showed a signal of dramatic scene in the piece. Finally the last movement, it first starts out as a festival where the queen finally marries the dangerous brother who just killed one of his fellow siblings. However, this celebratory scene does not last. Revenge is shown, in which the singers sing and act in dramatic and horrified state of being. This last piece was absolute contrast to the softness and the fragility of the beginning piece. The lack of resolution and the abrupt ending left the audience with an unstable feeling. Another aspect of this concert I appreciated was having the pleasure to see an opera soloist at work. For me, it made a beautiful and musical event even more pleasurable.

My family and I left Davies Hall as if I was floating on clouds. It had been a perfect musical evening. The musicians' emotional style and exceptional technique taught me how truly professional musician behave and play. I want to go back to the San Francisco Symphony as often as I can. I am very curious about the variety of music that those musicians play. On a scale from one to ten, I rate the performances a ten. I left inspired to become a better musician.

The Grand Finale

The performance was held in Carlmont Performing Arts Center and was the season finale of the PYO (Peninsula Youth Orchestra). The concert was divided into two parts: Peninsula Youth Artists, directed by Sara Salsbury and Peninsula Youth Orchestra, directed by Mitchell Sardou Klein. The PYO is an organization that brings young musicians together and educates them. This performance in particular was on 5/21/2017. The audience consisted of families of the performing artists and Mr. Dabaldo.

Some music performed by the Peninsula Youth Artists was The Irish Dragoon and the Romeo And Juliet Overture. Music performed by the Peninsula Youth Orchestra consisted of the Tragic Overture and Fantasia On A Theme. A noteworthy performance was the Concerto For Oboe And Strings in which PYO competition winner Maya Sun performed a solo on oboe. Overall, the orchestra performed well in terms of dynamics and their conduct was exemplary. The programming was done very well and there are no changes that could have made it better.

Both of these groups were very professional and acted very mature. I plan to see this group again soon. Their performance was excellent and would be rates as a 9.5/10. I would like to know why some of the music was chosen and if it had anything to do with the composers.

Stanford Jazz Orchestra

The Stanford Jazz orchestra featured Charles McCarthy, David Rokeach, Rick Vandivier, John Worley, and Murray Low. The performance took place at the palatial Bing concert hall, which has amazing acoustics throughout. The performance was on Wednesday the 10th of May, and I decided to attend because I love Charlie McCarthy's sound and style. I also went to see it because my private teacher Bob Farrington was filling on second alto.

I enjoyed the entire performance with the amazing mix of students, faculty and others from the surrounding music community. My favorite piece that they played was "Piesotes" which is a fun twist on John Coltrane's "Giant Steps". Overall the tone was amazing, getting carried along by a rhythm section who were perfectly together and swinging. Fredrick Berry's stories and background went to the very begging of every piece and who wrote it and why they wrote it. The only thing I could tweak is that the switches between performers were not the most organized and caused some long brakes in between the song. Another favorite of mine was "Isle of Mulobo Berry" by Sebastian Lanson. I was intrigued by the interesting sound of jazz style flute played by Charlie McCarthy mixed with flugelhorn played by John Worley. Neither of those instrument are especially common in big bands and the beautiful blend of them playing together truly showed the skill of the musicians.

The performance was an amazing mix of Bay Area talent tied together by the Stanford jazz ensemble. That plus the intricately designed Bing concert hall took this performance to the next level. This being the second time I have heard this group play I will definitely be heading back for there concluding concert next spring.

Everyone Should Go See “Anything Goes”

On Saturday, February 11, 2017 at 4 pm, I attended Carlmont High School’s production of “Anything Goes”. This musical is one of Cole Porter’s most famous musicals exploring the comedic stories of multiple characters aboard an ocean liner travelling from New York to London. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the musical as it was visually pleasing with great sets, costuming, and acting which added to the overall experience of a musical with great music.

My favorite song from the musical was the title song, “Anything Goes”. The song begins on a more serious note with a strong quarter note beat in the brass, sounding almost like a military march. However, the mood quickly changes as the song transitions from a minor key to a major key. A small accelerando along with a light cymbal keeping the beat give an overall lighthearted and fun mood to the song. This fun jazz feel lasts throughout the song, giving an infectious feeling of wanting to dance to the audience. Aside from the actual instrumentation being played in the pit orchestra, another great element of the music was the rhythmical tap dancing. The tap sounds added an aspect of light heartedness to the music while also being a great way to keep in time with the music. I had never seen a production where the actors on stage were such an integral part of the instrumentation of the songs, and I thought this was something very unique about this production which I enjoyed very much.

Overall, this musical was an immersive and fun show with exciting music and a comical storyline which I would highly recommend to others who enjoy lively music and dancing.