

Distractions Distinguish Riverfront Pops Concert

Written by Abbie Dombrock

Tuesday, 13 September 2005 18:00

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Music, family, friends, food, and tradition brought a huge crowd to the 23rd annual Quad City Symphony Orchestra Riverfront Pops concert last Saturday. An opportunity to enjoy classical music surrounded by nature, the concert consisted of lively and entertaining pieces supplemented by the addition of saxophonist Chris Vadala ... and accompanied by the pleasant cacophony of an audience enjoying the experience as well as the music.

In the end, the distractions set this concert apart and made it lighthearted. Colorful balloons, wind catchers, and flags dotted the field in which we sat. A V of geese seemed to laud the event, flying overhead during the opening number. The low hum of conversation, distant train whistles and traffic, and the pleasant breeze rustling the tree leaves above us created a friendly accompaniment to the performance.

Audience members enjoyed the concert with everything from Chinese take-out to meals eaten from tables boasting cut flowers, table linens, and candles. One group held a Hawaiian-themed get-together, complete with grass skirts and leis. During the concert, audience members picked their way through the groups of attendees, always with an alcoholic beverage of some kind in-hand, waving to acquaintances. The youngsters in front of us found pleasure in chomping caramel corn while making sculptures from the glow-in-the-dark necklaces being sold on the premises. Although the music sound quality was sub-par (being broadcast through loudspeakers is not the preferred way to hear a live orchestra), the atmosphere and the mood made up for it.

The program incorporated the lightheartedness. Master of Ceremonies Kai Swanson provided witty commentary on the pieces, which were chosen to please the diverse crowd. Beginning with the cheerful, rousing *Hungarian Dance No. 6* by Brahms, the concert quickly progressed to selections from Gershwin's

Porgy & Bess.

Next, the

Kitchen Percussion March

featured three percussionists. Taking the stage in chef's hats and aprons, they serenaded us using common kitchen implements, such as a wooden spoon on a saucepan. Offenbach's

Ballet Parisien

further pleased the crowd with its constantly changing styles and tempos.

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Finally, saxophonist Vadala joined the orchestra, performing two pieces by Mangione, a friend with whom Vadala has toured for 14 years. The two jazz compositions, *The Feel of a Vision* and *B'B*

ye showcased Vadala's range and technicality, and the latter slow ballad suited the atmosphere as attendees began to light candles and sip their second or third glass of wine.

After a short intermission during which many treated themselves to ice cream, the orchestra began again with a medley of familiar, hum-able tunes called *A Salute to the Big Apple*. The violin (or fiddle) section got a workout during the next piece,

Fiddle Faddle

, which featured rushed sets of runs and technical passages.

Serenade in Blue

followed, once again slowing the pace and preparing us for Vadala's return to the stage.

Oblivion, a Brazilian tango, soothed the audience even more with its slow tempo and mysterious-sounding melodies, but Vadala kept us alert with the occasional quick fill or full-length solo. The last three swing-era pieces, *In the Mood*, *In a Sentimental Mood*, and

Take the A Train

, were definite crowd-pleasers, bringing quite a few of the audience to their feet – so many, in fact, that Vadala stuck around for an encore, Ray Charles'

Georgia on My Mind

.

For the past few years, the 123rd Field Artillery has provided gun blasts during the yearly rendition of the *1812 Overture*, but this year the group is serving in Iraq. The South Bend Replicas filled in with startling on-beat cannon blasts. The orchestra wrapped up the night with

Stars & Stripes

Forever, accompanied by an impressive fireworks display.