

Solano Winds Community Concert Band
Sweet Sixteen concert season 'Birthdays' concert

Friday, March 18
Fairfield Center for Creative Arts
4 stars out of 4

Those who braved the wind and rain to attend the Solano Winds Concert Band performance at the Fairfield Center for Creative Arts on Friday were amply rewarded for their efforts. Music director and conductor Bill Doherty's eclectic program included a wide range of music, nominally connected by the winter and spring birthdays of the composers and arrangers featured.

Fittingly, the evening opened with a concert band setting of the song we all know as 'Happy Birthday to You'. In this arrangement by Ralph Ford, we heard it presented as a waltz, a pasadoble, as Dixieland jazz, and as it might be sung by an African-American gospel choir. The Winds cheerful, energetic reading of the piece moved seamlessly through its range of styles and tempos.

The next piece, Franz von Suppe's 'Poet and Peasant Overture', has accompanied many cartoon chase scenes. Set for concert band by eccentric conductor, band-leader, trombone player and erst-while circus performer Henry Fillmore, the work's introspective opening, featuring trumpets and trombones, and giving us the first of the evenings several lovely solo passages by saxophonist Stinn McDaniel and Bill Aron on oboe, quickly gave way to the lively 'chase scene' music, then galloped to an exciting finish. As delivered by the Winds, the 'Overture' was forthright and bracing where it needed to be, but equally effective in its quieter, near-contemplative passages.

Contrasts abounded in local composer Michael Senturia's 'Images for Concert Band (Homage to Debussy)'; piercing flutes against mellow saxophones, rich, moody horns following brash trumpets, thrusting brass interweaving sweet-sounding woodwinds, with Primrose Librado's piccolo skittering madly above it all. Though it seemed to lose focus a bit in the middle, Conductor Doherty took advantage of his opportunity to spotlight each section of the Winds in this challenging piece.

James Christensen's medley 'Tribute to Elvis' was enjoyed by band and audience alike. Neil Gould's 50's rocker style drumming anchored the work which yearned and swung in all right places. Next we heard Frederic Chopin's 'Minute Waltz', arranged for solo trumpet and band by David Werden. Fiendishly difficult arpeggio passages presented no difficulty for trumpeter Heather Handa, whose fearless attack and clean articulation earned her approbation from audience and band-members alike. 'Commando March' by Samuel Barber closed the first half of the program. Best known for classical work, Barber proved to be an effective composer of marches. The Winds brisk, melodic and optimistic reading showed the clarinet section to good advantage, with the melody and in supporting passages.

Karl King's straight-forward 'Purple Pageant' march opened a second half in which the Winds presented classical music, show-tunes, and marches with equal aplomb. Clark McAllister's arrangement of Franz Liszt's 'Hungarian Rhapsody No.2' again evoking cartoons, alternated full, rich-toned saxophones and clarinets with near-astringent brass, and built to a rousing conclusion. Energetic yet lyrical was the Winds rendition of the familiar songs included in 'Cole Porter Classics' (arrangement by Douglas Wegner), in which the brass reminded us they could be tender, and the woodwinds, that they could swing with the best.

Though not in the program (Doherty only received permission from the Russian publisher last week!), 'Vec'er Na R'eide' (Evening in Port) by composer Vasily Solovyov-Sedoni and arranged by Solano Winds trombonist Glen Lienhart was one of the highlights of the evening. Typically Russian in its enjoyment and dramatization of its own melancholy, 'Vac'er' laments the loneliness of life at sea. Opening with its theme presented by solo euphonium, here sensitively played by Lee Horton in an all-too-rare moment in the spotlight, the piece, sorrowful in mood and, at times, slow--moving, could easily slide into bathos. Doherty, alive to the dangers, drew an emotional yet taut performance from the Winds.

Once again, the Solano Winds treated us to a work composed resident clarinetist Clyde Vaiani. 'Blazonry', a collection of heraldic themes, played to the Winds strengths. Ably supported by a rock-solid percussion section, the brass section played with regal conviction, while the woodwinds kept interest and energy high in passages of some complexity.

The 'Finale' from Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 in F Minor (arranged by V.F. Safranek), features strings and woodwinds executing a series of intricate runs, which can easily lose definition and sound muddy. But the Winds trumpets, saxophones, clarinets and flutes in turns, executed these flashy runs flawlessly and with ease, leaving us to wonder, who needs strings, anyway?

And, in the nature of an encore, the Solano Winds concluded the evening with a vivacious reading of Henry Fillmore's circus-like march, 'Claxon'. All in all, another wonderful concert from one of Solano County's best!

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