

OPINION

There's no music like show music, like no music he knows

Dear Zoey, Sam,
Katie and Klernan:

Let's talk music. I grew up surrounded by all forms of music. My Aunt Marge often played 78 rpm recordings of German operas and my parents provided contrast by playing the latest Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby hits.

I worked as a disc jockey during the late 1950s, spinning records by Elvis Presley, The Four Lads, Pat Boone and the Everly Brothers.

Over the years I've learned to appreciate jazz, gospel, big band, folk groups and just about anything but country. For some reason I've never much liked county and western music.

But there are two forms of music that are truly my favorite: Classical and Broadway show tunes.

I'd have to credit your Great Uncle Robert for my interest in classical music.

Although we were born seven years apart, Bob and I grew up sharing the same bedroom until he finished college, married and moved to Chicago.

Being older, your Uncle Bob would usually get up much earlier. Once up he would immediately turn on the small 45 rpm phonograph between our beds and play something from his classical record library. It wasn't unusual to be stirred out of sleep by the "1812 Overture" or Bach's "Requiem Mass."

I think my love for Broadway music came from attending an endless number of mov-



PETER W. WAGNER
PUBLISHER

Letters

TO MY GRANDCHILDREN

ies of Broadway's best at the State and Hollywood theaters in Sioux Falls, SD. I'd usually attend on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon so I could stay for two back-to-back showings of "Show Boat," "Oklahoma," "The Pajama Game," "Guys and Dolls" or "South Pacific."

I remember when your grandmother and I were first married the film version of "Sound of Music" opened for a lengthy run in Sioux Falls. Grandma and I saw and enjoyed it once. My grandmother, GaGa Castle, who lived alone and had outlived both her daughters, must have attended screenings close to 20 times.

So you will understand my excitement last weekend attending the Northwest Iowa Symphony Orchestra's pop concert of songs of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. It was a wonderful combination of a classically trained orchestra and some of the best of America's Broadway music.

I regularly say area residents are lucky to have an orchestra of NISO's quality and commitment in our region.

The Northwest Iowa Symphony Orchestra is composed of professional, interested

adults and area students from grade school through college age musicians. The professionals are instructors at Dordt College in Sioux Center and Northwestern College in Orange City as well as Augustana University in Sioux Falls and the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

The NISO programs are always enjoyable and varied in their themes and balance of classical and more popular music. Despite the limited practice time afforded the 80-plus members, they never disappoint in their performance.

Saturday's program, played to one of the largest audiences I have ever seen at Dordt's B.J. Haan Auditorium, was no exception.

Perhaps one of the reasons the NISO concerts are so good is everyone comes fully expecting to have a wonderful time. That includes the audience and members of the orchestra as well as the conductor.

The spirit of joy and genuine love for what he is doing exhibited by principal conductor Christopher Stanichar of Sioux Falls is infectious. A conductor, composer and university educator, Stanichar always appears to be enjoying the per-



formance as much as anyone. His introduction narratives, broad happy facial expressions and personal warmth addressing the audience draws one and all into the experience.

Saturday's Rogers and Hammerstein pops concert was loaded heavily with the pair's productions of "Carousel," "South Pacific," "The King and I," "Oklahoma" and "Sound of Music." The two men produced their first musical, "Oklahoma" when your papa was 5. They staged their last effort, "Sound of Music," about the time I was finishing college.

To enhance the orchestra's classic performance, the organizers arranged to have four talented vocalists be part of the program. They were Pamela De Haan, a mezzo-soprano; Brandon Hendrickson, baritone; Shannon Salyards, soprano and Russell Svenningsen, tenor.

All four were excellent in the performance of their solos and duets. Their highly honed vocals kept the evening lively and interesting. Both Salyards and Svenningsen received well-deserved applause for their demanding solo performances.

But I especially enjoyed De Haan and Hendrickson. They

began the evening with a duet performance that impressed me with the interaction they shared then and all through the evening.

They remained in character throughout the night with interested glances at each other, expressive gestures and obvious reactions to words being sung to them. Their physical involvement brought extra life to the messages being sung.

Hendrickson even kicked off the opening of the second half of the concert by beginning his song, without the use of a microphone, from the back of the auditorium. His strong, beautiful voice easily carried over the entire seating area as he walked down the center aisle to the raised platform.

Orchestras are most often praised for their string section and the Northwest Iowa Symphony Orchestra has an accomplished such group. Two of the string bass players, John and Marian Casey of Sioux Falls, are close friends of your cousin Chris Wagner. Chris was once John's stand partner when they both played in Chicago's Northwestern College Orchestra.

Chris later resettled in Switzerland where for many years he played string bass for one of its national orchestras. Both Chris and John enjoy praising the musical ability of the other.

But I also have to acknowledge the depth and skill of the brass and woodwind section. Viewed from the audience they are few in number. But when

they are called on to do so they can rattle the ceiling with their rousing pure tone and resonating volume.

The winter pops concert, children, is always special for the annual fundraising Celebrity Conductor Contest. The money raising effort climaxes with the individual raising the most dollars given the opportunity to direct the orchestra.

This year the participants were Alan Laird of Orange City, Marlowe Van Ginkel of Rock Valley and Josh Bower of Sioux Center. Bower, the assistant principal at Sioux Center Christian School, was the winner and given the chance to conduct the "Colonel Bogey March" from the movie "The Bridge on the River Kwai."

But the orchestra had some fun with Bower, continuing on with a swell of enthusiasm at least three times when it appeared the piece was about to end. To Bower's credit he jumped right back in to moving his arms and baton each time and even invited the audience to whistle the popular theme at the proper moments.

It was one of those very special evenings that Papa likes best. I only wish all four of you could have been there with Grandma and me.

Love,
Papa

Peter W. Wagner lives in Sibley. He is the founder and publisher of The N'West Iowa REVIEW and may be reached at pw@iowainformation.com.