

## OPINION

# N'West Iowa music scene, NISO strike the right chord

**M**y wife, Connie, has enjoyed remarkable physical improvement recently and is finally able to once again get out and about.

She has been housebound on and off — but mostly on — for more than a year. So, she is often surprised at the changes that have taken place in the N'West Iowa communities we frequent. It is amazing how many things can change in just one year.

Tuesday night we ventured to Sioux Center for the first 2018-19 performance of the Northwest Iowa Symphony Orchestra. Connie and I enjoy listening to a wide variety of music from popular to Christian to classical. Connie especially loves soft, engaging melodies performed by numerous stringed instruments. I lean the other way for the powerful crescendos of a strongly emotional piece composed by Bedrich Smetana, Richard Wagner or



**PETER W. WAGNER**  
PUBLISHER

Antonin Dvorak to name a few. The NISO concert had ample amounts of both to satisfy us. I don't claim to be a music expert. I can't play in instrument having quit the violin the very day my parents accepted their son was never going to master the instrument. Looking back, I wish I had stuck with it. The comfort and relaxing powers of music you create yourself seems magical to me.

But my wife and I have had the pleasure of hearing many famous orchestras worldwide and I contend the NISO musicians are as worthy of an

appreciative audience as any of the most professional musicians we've heard.

Tuesday night's program was titled "Nordic Notes." It included four pieces, including German composer Engelbert Humperdinck's "Prelude to Hansel and Gretel" and Edvard Grieg's "Peer Gynt Suite #1."

No, that isn't the Humperdinck you remember belting out teenage ballads when you were in high school. Instead it's the late 19th century composer who you might best remember for the melody that goes with the words "When at night I go to sleep . . ."

NISO conductor Christopher Stanichar added a modern composition to the evening with his own "Hans Christian Anderson Suite." Based on Anderson's "The Tin Toy Soldier" and two other short stories, the composition nicely explored through melody, orchestration and variety of

tempo the emotions of each tale. It was the composition's Iowa premiere.

Providing an exciting finish to what was already a most satisfying concert was "Finlandia" by Jean Sibelius. Sibelius is a 19th century composer who lived during the Russian occupation of his homeland. "Finlandia" represents the tension and hope of the Finnish people as they wait for the time when they will once again be free to rule themselves. True to our personal preferences, I reveled in the first and last movements with the strong presence of the brass and percussion. The constant riffs and volley of the music represents, at least to me, the torment and desire for revolution the Finnish people were feeling at the time.

Connie, true to her love of strings, especially enjoyed the middle movement when the notes represent a desire for peace, the beauty of the coun-

try and the people's love of their culture and heritage. You might best know this movement as the hymn "Be still my soul."

I told conductor Stanichar, who was in the lobby following the concert, that "Finlandia" was the perfect conclusion for the opening program and a fitting promise of what is to be heard the rest of the season.

As we were leaving Dordt College's B.J. Haan Auditorium, where the NISO programs are presented, Connie and I ran into Dick and Marsha Swanson. They are retired and live in Spirit Lake. But they regularly make the drive to Sioux Center for NISO concerts. Some of you may remember Dick from when he taught agriculture at Northwest Iowa Community College. The couple moved from Sheldon to the Iowa Great Lakes area when Dick was given the opportunity to begin farming on his own. They con-

tinued in education, however, teaching for many years at the Emmetsburg campus of Iowa Lakes Community College.

Dick, who plays string base, shared that he is a member of the Cherokee Symphony. That group of about 50 area musicians presents three concerts a year at the Cherokee Community Center. Its opening program, a salute to veterans, was last Sunday. The symphony's remaining Sunday afternoon programs are Feb. 24 and April 14.

So good music exists all around us. In N'West Iowa. Connie and I are delighted we have NISO concerts to look forward to and may attempt to attend a Cherokee Symphony concert.

*Peter W. Wagner lives in Sibley. He is the founder/publisher of The N'West Iowa REVIEW and may be reached at [pw@iowainformation.com](mailto:pw@iowainformation.com).*