

Closing Philharmonic Concert At Center Is Held Delightful

By SYLVIA S. CUTLER

Wilkes College Center for Performing Arts was the scene Saturday night for closing concert of the season of Wilkes-Barre Philharmonic Orchestra, with Ferdinand Liva, conductor, in its annual presentation of "pop" music.

What made it a particularly gala night was a combination of factors. First, the setting could not be more attractive, nor more conducive to a festive event than Wilkes Center; second, technical excellence of the center enhances any performance given there. The tiers of seats rising from a thrust stage gives every person a perfect view, and lends a feeling of intimacy. The interior acoustics couldn't be better, each note played was heard to its

fullest magnitude, whether it was meant to be bombastic, or the merest whisper.

Third, the program was chosen excellently. Enough of the music was familiar and beloved to keep the audience on confident ground, and enough was comparatively new to them to offer them a bit of a challenge.

Finally, it was a marvelous spring night, the audience was in an excellent mood, and the orchestra seemed inspired, playing with vivacity, dash, color, an aura of "come, fellas, let's give it everything we've got!"

It was a most stimulating night from first to last.

But now for details: The opening was Overture to Rossini's "La Gazza Ladra." (The Thieving Magpie) an excellent choice. This was a sprightly piece of music in which the drums, the cellos and the flutes had a chance to shine. Following was the lively Fourth Movement (Allegro con fuoco) of Tchaikovsky's "Symphony No. 4," in which the woodwinds were predominant, and which required much sustained effort.

This was by way of leading up to the piece de resistance, excerpts from Bizet's "Carmen." These numbered five: Two by the orchestra alone, and three featuring Helen Ralston as the soloist. The orchestra here performed with verve and gayety, as befits this opera, and Mrs. Ralston has never sounded so fine. The solo "Habanera," with which most people are familiar (languorous, languorous), was not written by Bizet at all, but by Sebastian Yradier, who lived in Cuba, and who called his composition "El Arreglito." It became popular only because Bizet decided to use it in his opera. And then, what makes "Carmen" doubly interesting, is that it's about a Spanish gypsy, but is sung entirely in French.

Mrs. Ralston also sang "Seguidilla" and the "Gypsy Song" from "Dance Boheme," all from "Carmen." All three are challenging pieces of music, containing as they do successions of rapid notes, calling for precise breath control. Mrs. Ralston hit each note squarely on the top. Her tonal qualities, phrasing, and interpretation are excellent, and her performance was electrifying. The appreciative audience called her back to the platform three or four times.

Orchestra concluded the first half with several selections from "Richard III," a Shakespeare Suite, by William Walton, much more subdued music, giving the orchestra and the audience a chance to catch their breath.

Second half opened with "Intermezzo" by Ernst Toch, a lovely, restrained piece of music, and Leonard Bernstein's Overture to "Candide," which was both lively and lovely.

Program was concluded with excerpts from "Camelot," the popular stage play by Lerner and Loewe, arranged by Robert Russell Bennett. Mrs. Ralston was soloist in "Lusty Month of May" and in "Follow Me." One somehow never gets tired of Camelot. It's refreshing and delightful, and not too demanding. The orchestra and Mrs. Ralston showed their versatility by giving this simple music concert stature. One thing we noticed, the entire rendition would have been lost but for the proficiency of the dependable bass drum.

As encore, Liva presented a very small piece for strings called "Fox Hill," which had been played at the youth concert. This by Forsmann had "Do Ye Ken John Peel" interwoven into it.

One advantage of the Wilkes Center is that the orchestra is arranged in a half-moon, which gives a more unified tone than the traditional arrangement on larger stages. Wilkes Center most definitely enhances the work of our orchestra; it is an ideal place for it to play; they sound magnificent in this setting. Strings particularly take on a sweetness and mellowness they have not had in other auditoriums, where often the sound is lost in the vast corners of the high ceilings.

We add one additional note: Such a diversified audience was it, that it contained one very, very young member, eight-month-old Daanna Weissgerber, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Weissgerber, Kingston. Daanna's mother, Jane, is a cellist with the orchestra. Many eyes were focused on the little girl as she listened to mommy play. With all this, the audience agreed it was a delightful night.