

Review of Concord Band Winter Concert—March 2, 2013—for the Concord Journal

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On March 2, the Concord Band performed “Rhapsody in Blue: Made in America.” Before a nearly sold-out crowd, director James O’Dell stepped on stage, and the music began immediately with excellent tone and intonation. *Americans We* featured a sparkling trumpet trio, to which the woodwinds added their filigree with panache.

Robert Russell Bennett’s *Suite of Old American Dances* is rhythmically complex, with a sound reminiscent of Broadway. Memorable moments include a low-register flute section soli, when the delicate percussion instruments gently added to the texture. Later, low brass played in beautifully-blended unison, and an ethereal sound created by the English horn and flutes was difficult to identify. O’Dell told the audience that this is a “player’s piece,” meaning that the musicians love to play it, and the music presents challenges that stretch the technical abilities of the group.

Percy Grainger’s *Children’s March*, sprinkled with humor, caused the audience to chuckle after the final cadence. Then on a more serious note, Band President Ken Troup presented an award to the longest-tenured member, trombonist Andy Nichols. Nichols looked emotional when receiving a plaque honoring his 50 years of service.

The first half concluded with Charles Ives’ famous set of *Variations on America*. The first expression of the melody is understated, *sostenuto* and not the slightest bit majestic, with creative chromatic sprinkles that grow increasingly dissonant. One wonders if Ives might be making a statement about his country itself. Could he have been describing the melting pot in musical terms? By the end, Ives sounds as if he has taken the top off a blender and allowed all of the themes to spray across the kitchen, only to come together with a homophonic ending.

After intermission, we were treated to the talents of piano soloist Michael Lewin. First, a flashy *Tarantelle* by Louis Moreau Gottschalk, and finally, the most famous work on the program: *Rhapsody in Blue*. Clarinetist Steven Barbas began the trill and ascending scale followed by a glissando, and the band took turns tossing bits of melody back and forth with the piano. Lewin approached the technically demanding work with athletic perfection, exercising extremes in dynamics and rubato. O’Dell and the band did an amazing job following the soloist through tempo fluctuations.

Lewin takes his work very seriously. He does not perform with the humor one might expect from the music he was playing. His musicianship is superb, with incredible dynamic contrast, and his playing showed soul and beautiful expression.

*Rhapsody in Blue* was met with a standing ovation. Before his final Gershwin encore, Mr. Lewin gave a nod to the musical community in Concord. “I am so impressed with the facility you have here,” he explained, naming each of the groups supported by the Friends of Performing Arts in Concord. “If every community in Massachusetts had one of these, the Arts would be much healthier.”

Congratulations to all involved, and I look forward to the next Concord Band concert!