

Evergreen Philharmonic Baroque Festival 2007

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The Evergreen Philharmonic Orchestra is a student orchestra consisting of the best high school musicians in the Issaquah School District.[†] Last weekend I attended their annual Baroque Festival, although there was only one Baroque piece on the program. (False advertising, maybe, but I'll let it slide.) Why was I at a high school student concert? Did I know somebody in the orchestra? Nope. A group of us attended because many of the members in the orchestra are former students of my friend the seventh grade teacher, and I figured it'd be interesting. Of course, since it's a high school student orchestra, you have to set your expectations accordingly. What I wasn't expecting was how tentatively most of the students performed; it was as if they were scared of the music. I'll have to chalk that up to performance anxiety. The orchestra started playing with more confidence once we reached the part of the concert where the orchestra took the role of accompanist to various soloists, ironically, the moment at which the orchestra needed to play more subdued! Not everyone responded to the pressure by playing softly. One[‡] of the soloists responded by rushing through a cadenza faster than I've ever heard it played before. Oh, and a little performance tip for the other two soloists: Resist the urge to have a chat during the first soloist's big cadenza. Aside: When I was a student, I recall being nervous up there on stage, but once each piece started, I entered some heightened state of focus, and the audience simply disappeared. I remember once, between pieces, I peeked out into the audience, and it was so scary, I promised never to do it again. One student emerged as the standout. The second piece on the concert, the Scherzo from Dvořák's Serenade for Strings, was performed without a conductor, but I noticed that the first violinist was practically motionless. How was he managing to keep the ensemble together? Then I noticed two other performers who were noticeably more expressive. One was a bit *too* expressive, as if dancing to a piece of pop music secretly piped in via headphones. The other was the lead violist, who clearly was the one in charge. She cued the tempo changes, telegraphed entrances, and generally did the work of keeping the group together. She was a soloist for the next piece, and her talent really shone. She played with confidence and poise, and it was hardly a surprise to read in the program that she is heading off to college on a viola scholarship. I've made a note to check up in about four years to see if she's made a name for herself. **Nitpicker's corner** [†]s/musicians/orchestral musicians/. I mean, it's an orchestra. Did I really have to clarify that?

‡Students are not named due to their age.

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