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Midwest Young Artists perform brilliantly in their first concert of the season at Pick-Staiger Hall

- November 1st, 2010 7:28 pm CT

Contemporary, Classical and Jazz Music Performed in Halloween Attire

The Chicago area's most talented young musicians took the stage and performed brilliantly a varied program of contemporary, jazz and classical music at Pick-Staiger Hall at Northwestern University in Evanston. Sunday night was a treat to the eyes and ears of those in attendance at the "Be Bold" Concert of Midwest Young Artists advanced large ensembles. Performing in this concert were the Honors Wind Symphony, directed by James Ripley, the Big Band, directed by Chris Madsen, and Midwest Young Artists signature ensembles, the Concert Orchestra and the Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of the MYA Founder and Director, Allan Dennis. This Halloween concert was performed by the students in their full Halloween costumes- clowns, witches, cats, movie stars, carton characters among them, so it was a colorful event, needless to say! But the music making was the real treat- and you really had to hear it to believe it.

Concert and Symphony Orchestras

The highlight of the concert was the performances by the two orchestras after the Intermission. Concert Orchestra performed the first two movements from Dvorak's Symphony No. 8- and played with such precision, beauty of tone and balance in all sections, exquisite phrasing and tremendous excitement and energy. The winds, brass and string sections all performed like pros- their eyes were on the conductor, Allan Dennis, and they displayed confident virtuosity at the complete service of the music. The 130+ member Symphony Orchestra subsequently performed Bela Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, which Allan Dennis announced is decidedly "one of the

hardest pieces of music for an orchestra to play”. He thanked the audience, consisting mostly of parents and friends of the students, for the privilege to work with them and conduct them in this piece. This monumental work was played with such complete mastery, commitment, lush sound and musicality, that it was difficult to believe that these were only high school students performing in this orchestra. In fact, Charlie Pikler, principal Violist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, who was in attendance at the concert, said afterwards that “ 30 years ago you would never be able to find a youth orchestra that could even dream of performing this piece”. More people should make a point to subscribe and attend every one of Midwest Young Artists’ orchestra concerts. They are truly not to be missed and are an excellent value for the most discerning concert-goers on a tight budget.

Honors Wind Symphony and Big Band

The concert opened with a relatively small and newer ensemble in the MYA line-up, the Honors Wind Symphony, playing refreshing, appealing works by two American 20th century composers. The first work, Old Wine in New Bottles by Gordon Jacob (1895-1984), consisted of two short pieces- Early One Morning and The Wraggle Taggle Gypsies. Both pieces were characterized by many lyrical melodies, charming jaunty rhythms, beautiful harmonies, and utilized canonic and fugal writing perfectly suited for a small chamber music group. Two pieces, the best one being “Chester”, from The New England Triptych by William Schuman (1910-1992), concluded this group’s outstanding performance. The engaging Dr. Ripley, was dressed for Halloween in an appropriate “Conductor’s” uniform- a train conductor, that is. The Big Band that followed was equally impressive, with a seemingly older group of jazz musicians. Saxophones, trumpets, jazz guitar, bass, and piano were the featured instruments in this ensemble which featured a great sound and marvelous improvised solos by several of its members. This ensemble performed works by such jazz luminaries as Tom Garling, Duke Ellington and Edgar Sampson. Chris Madsen directed this group, but like most jazz directors, he gave the tempos and then he let the players lead the way and take center stage, so to speak, conducting only as often as necessary.

About Midwest Young Artists:

Midwest Young Artists is the premiere orchestra and chamber music training school in the Midwest, and perhaps in the entire country, for students ages 5 to 18. Offering its students participation in both small chamber music ensembles and large, full symphonic orchestras, along with bands, jazz and choral ensembles and music theory, Midwest Young Artists prepares its students for professional careers in music or for a lifetime of appreciation of music. The dedication and vision of Dr. Allan Dennis continues to inspire and enrich the lives of literally hundreds of children year after year after year. This year’s concert series, entitled “Be Inspired” has already lived up to its name. Attend all the concerts in this series, and you will be inspired, too!