

WAUS HEARS ITZHAK PERLMAN AT RAVINIA FESTIVAL

by Samantha Snively

Dorothy Gall remembers when violinist Itzhak Perlman was first introduced on the Johnny Carson Show. “He’d played at a few classical venues, but nobody had really heard of him yet.” Now, of course, the world knows him as one of the best violinists of the century. Among his early American debuts was a performance of Tchaikovsky’s “Violin Concerto in D Major” at a summer outdoor concert in the Chicago suburbs, called the Ravinia Festival.

A regular visitor to Ravinia since then, Perlman returned this summer exactly 45 years after his debut to play Beethoven’s “Violin Concerto in D Major.” In the audience were 36 devoted and longtime listeners of WAUS, the Andrews University radio station.

Every summer, WAUS sponsors a trip to the Ravinia Festival to hear a world-renowned performer like Itzhak Perlman. In years previous, they’ve seen pianist Lang Lang, violinist Joshua Bell, and flautist Sir James Galway. The second day of the trip is devoted to a cultural activity, such as a tour of a Frank Lloyd Wright house or a visit to a music library. This year, Sandra Dobrucki, the TCU travel agent that WAUS has worked with for 10 years, arranged for the group to visit the Gold Pyramid House.

Before the concert began, the group gathered for supper on the Ravinia Park grounds. Over supper, various members shared their experiences with WAUS. Many of the attendees had been on Ravinia trips before; all of them were longtime listeners. Bob and Bonnie Havlick have been on more than 10 trips with WAUS. One of Bonnie’s favorite things to do, she says, is “read a book and listen to WAUS.” Composers from the Classical period—Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn and the like—are listener favorites, says station manager Sharon Dudgeon.

Some listeners even donate their own musical collections to the station. George Stump and his wife Barbara are “dedicated listeners of WAUS, our dial is always set to the station.” Recently, they donated 40 of their own CDs to the station.

The concert began with one of Mahler’s earliest works, the cantata



Top: Boarding the bus for the trip to hear Itzhak Perlman at the Ravinia Festival
Above: Coveted tickets to the big event

“Das Klagen Lied.” Based on the fairytale “The Singing Bones” by the Brothers Grimm, Mahler’s piece follows two brothers, one good and one evil, into the woods to find an enchanted flower that will win the queen’s hand in marriage. The good brother finds the flower, but is killed by the evil brother, who marries the queen. A minstrel finds the good brother’s bones, carves a flute out of them, and as he plays it, it tells the story of the good brother’s fate. “Ultimately, Mahler was trying to tell us that it’s up to the artist to give voice to those who can’t speak for themselves,” says Herman Vanders, a retired literature teacher on the trip.

The chorus of summer cicadas grew silent just in time for Perlman to come onstage to thundering applause, and take his seat in front of the orchestra. After the first movement, *allegro ma non troppo*, the audience burst into applause. Silence reigned through the *largetto* and *rondo*, and “you could tell the orchestra realized they could relax and enjoy Perlman’s playing,” says Vanders. Even Perlman seemed completely comfortable in the music, and he made the complicated finale look effortless.

On Friday, after breakfast at the hotel, the group traveled to the northern suburbs of Chicago to the Gold Pyramid House. Built in 1977 by Jim and Linda Onan, the six-story Gold Pyramid House rises above the modest bungalows around it, and welcomes visitors with a 64-foot statue of Ramses II. Jim Onan had always been fascinated with Egyptology and the myths surrounding “pyramid power,” and built Pyramid House as an inhabitable experiment. Later, Onan also constructed a scale model of King Tutankhamen’s tomb with replicas of artifacts from the tomb, and a gift shop. Onan’s son Rocco led the group

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around the first three floors of the house, mixing the history of the house with urban legends.

The Ravinia trip is just one of the many developments WAUS has overseen in the last 10 years. In addition to the new studios at the Howard Performing Arts Center, WAUS has also expanded their

Above: Thirty-six WAUS members joined the two-day trip to Chicago for a concert at the Ravinia Festival and other sightseeing opportunities. Left: A catered buffet was provided in a private tent on the Festival grounds. Bottom left: Samantha Snively poses with the 64-foot statue of Ramses II at the Gold Pyramid House. Bottom right: A replica of one of King Tutankhamen's masks

availability to listeners online. They now boast an international listener base. "We've got people listening in Germany, Russia, China..." says Teddy Weithers, marketing director and announcer. And rather than incorporating any drastically new programming, says Dudgeon, WAUS is improving their quality. "For us, a good thing is if we're getting better at what we're doing without earth-shaking changes. We're trying to be a good classical station."

And WAUS is "pretty much an American jewel," says Weithers. Less than 1 percent of the radio stations in the country are 24-hour nonprofit stations like WAUS. Many classical stations have had to incorporate other genres of music or increasingly rely on advertisement revenue, but WAUS is still listener-supported and advertisement-free. A third of their budget comes from the more than 2,000 members who renew each year during their biannual fundraising drives. With more and more members renewing online, the station has significantly shortened their member drives, which allows them to play more of the music their listeners love.

Recently, WAUS has begun branching out to more listeners through social media, Second Sunday summer concerts at Fernwood Botanical Gardens, the annual Member Thank-you Concert, and a partnership with the Benton Harbor Public Schools called "Classical Connections for Schools." Classical Connections collects gently used instruments, refurbishes them, and donates them to Benton Harbor public school music programs.

Find out more about this American gem by visiting their website, www.waus.org, or visiting their Facebook page by searching for WAUS-FM. You can listen online and find out about the benefits of being a member on their website, and help support the gift of classical music. ■

Samantha Snively, student writer for IMC, fulfilled a dream of hearing Itzhak Perlman perform when she accompanied WAUS to Ravinia.