

Ave Formosissima

by Dana Rajczewski, University of Richmond

Last week I experienced one of our performances from a patron's point of view. I hadn't done this in a little while, but I'd been looking forward to the Washington Symphonic Brass concert since our season was announced back in July. I should preface this by saying that I am a trumpet player. I began playing in 4th grade. The Darien, Connecticut school system truly understands how to get kids involved in the arts from an early age, and for that I'm eternally grateful. Up until about 4 years ago (when my clumsiness resulted in an emergency trip to the dentist for a front tooth crown), I played consistently - orchestra, jazz ensemble, wind ensemble, pep band, lessons, recitals, weddings, etc.

Monday night's WSB concert reminded me how much I truly miss playing, and this may have been the final piece of motivation I've needed to get started again.

From the first note of the performance's opening piece (a fantastic Dukas fanfare), I was totally hooked. As I sat in the middle of the concert hall, I stared wide-eyed at the stage. It's very cliché, but the best way to describe it is that I felt - and I'm sure looked - like a kid on Christmas morning. I couldn't stop smiling in amazement, and I'm fairly sure that I had a ridiculously goofy grin on my face for the whole first half of the performance.

But the best was yet to come. The second half of the performance featured selections from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* that Phil Snedecor - co-founder, arranger, and trumpet player for WSB - arranged for brass and percussion. As soon as the group played their first notes of *O Fortuna*, I had goosebumps. The brass sounds in particular filled the concert hall, and the feeling of being surrounded by such beautiful music was just incredible. While it is tough to beat the brilliance and sheer drama of both *O Fortuna* sections, the section that really stood out to me was *Ave formosissima*. It sounded to me like a soundtrack to some sort of triumphant march or ceremony, and I was sitting on the edge of my seat wondering where the music would go next. And that final chord - wow! It was so powerful! The WSB held that out that chord for a few seconds before leading into the final section - the second *O Fortuna*. What an ending!

After standing and applauding with my fellow audience members, I moved quickly out to the lobby to purchase one of the WSB CDs. As I sit here writing, I'm listening to *Washington Symphonic Brass: Burana in Brass*, and I highly recommend that you listen to this too. I found out that *Ave formosissima* translates to "Hail, most beautiful one". Now that is an incredible line in a love poem, along with the later line "Hail, light of the world". But to me it's a perfect title for this already amazing piece of music, made even better by the Washington Symphonic Brass.