

MEETING the Symphony

BY BETH EISERLOH JOHNSON



Grant Llewellyn chats with (left to right) Colleen Suite, Becky Servido, Kim and Nick Miceli, and Phillip Kirchhoff.

Looking for a fresh perspective on things, Opus invited some uninitiated concertgoers to attend North Carolina Symphony performances and give us their feedback. All parties had a brilliant time and provided us with valuable insight, helping us to step away from the assumptions we make about the concert experience.

Mike Capps and Julianne Greer attended the January 17 performance with violinist Midori and guest conductor Michael Christie; Nick Miceli, his wife Kim and his brother Phillip Kirchhoff joined us for Grant Llewellyn's February 28 concert with keyboardist Robert Levin, as did friends Colleen Suite and Becky Servido. In addition, our guests enjoyed pre-concert backstage tours and a chance to mingle with the guest artists at a post-concert reception. Here are some of their thoughts on their encounter with the North Carolina Symphony. A special thank you to all our enthusiastic lab rats!

On their overall experience:

"The Symphony team treated us like royalty. It was really interesting to get 'behind the scenes' a little and to meet the performers and the hard-working team who puts these events on night after night." (Capps and Greer)

"We had a wonderful experience. The program selection and venue were great!" (Suite and Servidio)

"We arrived a few minutes late, so had the chance to compare listening to the live performance from the waiting area, and from inside the hall. It's amazing what a difference it made to us both – there

was so much more emotion conveyed. We listen to classical music regularly, but there was simply no substitute for the live performance." (Capps and Greer)

On the performance and artists:

"The performance was great! Without much previous background on the selections, I was grateful for the opportunity to meet and gain some knowledge from Grant Llewellyn and Robert Levin prior to the performance. Their passion for the selections and performance was amazing and inspiring." (Miceli, Miceli, and Kirchhoff)



Mike Capps and Julianne Greer meet Midori.

"Midori played a difficult piece with such grace and emotion, it really was a pleasure to watch. The piece was one Mike had studied years ago in a college music appreciation course!" (Capps and Greer)

"At first I felt without having a background in music I would be like 'a fish out of water.' I am a sports guy, so I got the impression I was in the presence of the 'Michael Jordan' of the symphony world with the guest artist [Robert Levin]." (Miceli, Miceli, and Kirchhoff)

"After the intermission, we were able to change seats to just above the stage. It was very interesting to see the expressions on the performers' faces and was truly amazing to see that Robert Levin didn't play with any music in front of him – such talent!" (Miceli, Miceli, and Kirchhoff)

On meeting the artists:

"I have to admit that was one of the highlights of my evening [was meeting Levin and Llewellyn]. They are the most down-to-earth gentlemen. They spoke to our group with ease; they spoke with such passion for what they did." (Suite and Servidio)

"Michael Christie was warm and friendly. We asked some hard questions and he handled them all with good grace. It was quite an education! Midori was all business – she's a very serious performer.

When we met her, she looked very much like she wanted to get back to her hotel to start practicing again." (Capps and Greer)

"I was surprised at how approachable Mr. Llewellyn is, extremely down to earth. Symphony concerts have the reputation of being stuffy. My night at the Symphony dispelled that belief. Thank you!!" (Suite and Servidio)

On coming back:

"We'd definitely attend again. We liked the mix of selections the night we attended – a classic piece, and something new for us to enjoy. The concert hall is beautiful and our seats placed us close enough to see the performers' effort very well. One question – why aren't there televisions outside the hall in the waiting area? Sadly, we missed the first part of the performance. It sure would have been great to at least be able to watch on a CCTV while waiting." (Capps and Greer)

"I would consider attending again; I would like to bring my children for them to experience it." (Suite and Servidio)

"Yes, for me my symphony experience was something different to do. Like most folks a typical night out on the town is dinner and a movie." (Miceli, Miceli, and Kirchhoff)



WE VISIT THE NORTH CAROLINA SYMPHONY: ONE PATRON'S EXPERIENCE

By Mickela Sonola

When my husband Paul and I, along with our two children Olivia and Sebbie, headed off to Meymandi Concert Hall to see the North Carolina Symphony present *Bugs Bunny on Broadway*, I was very excited. I love live music of any kind and I've always loved cartoons; in fact we are a family of animation lovers. I was literally rubbing my hands with anticipation.

As we took our seats to the sound of the orchestra tuning up, there was an audience of all ages, from the very young to the young at heart. The pure energy and verve of the orchestra which accompanied the fast-paced animations kept the children fully engaged during the well-timed pauses when conductor George Daugherty stopped to give us the background of the artists and musicians behind the Warner Bros.' *Looney Tunes*.

Olivia and Sebbie's favorite section was 'What's Opera,' with Bugs Bunny as a crazed conductor. They loved the connection between the cartoon and the real life conductor. Daugherty took his bow at the same time as onscreen Bugs Bunny!

It was incredibly refreshing and unusual to be watching a film with a live orchestra; it took the sound out of the reel and brought the animation to "life." Classical music is rarely used in animation anymore and these cartoons were probably my first introduction to famous classical music scores such as *The Blue Danube* (the cartoon 'High Note' uses Strauss's famous waltz). It was truly wonderful to share that experience with Olivia and Sebbie.

I think the important part of the night was that it was a lively and fun experience for all of us. It more than lived up to our expectations and was a wonderful introduction to classical music for the children. I'm looking forward to bringing them back to hear some of that music again, this time in the pace that they were originally intended!



Sebbie and Olivia at the Bugs Bunny on Broadway Concert