

## **The Greatest Generation, The Greatest Music**

**A review by Jack Bagley**

The men who fought World War II are known as “the Greatest Generation.” And Saturday night at Callaway Auditorium, that generation was saluted with the greatest music – the music of World War II – by the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra.

In honor of Memorial Day, the Orchestra performed a Pops Concert called, “Songs That Won the War,” and the selections performed were just as advertised. Under the direction of Conductor Patricio Cobos, the Pops Concert entertained hundreds of people who either remember World War II or just read about it in history books.

The evening began with a stirring rendition of the National Anthem, followed by an evening of Glenn Miller music that brought tears of joy to the eyes of many people seated near me. The first number, “Sing Sing Sing,” was accompanied by excellent swing dancing from Bradley Shaw and Tiffany Drake. For people who enjoy swing music (like me), the drum solo of Paul Vaillancourt alone was worth the price of admission.

Maestro Cobos then led the orchestra through “Pennsylvania 6-5000,” another classic Miller hit. Solos on the trumpet by Jason Pellett and saxophone by Amy Griffiths brought the music to life. Following that, singers John Dreher and Sharon Coffey joined the orchestra for “Chattanooga Choo-Choo,” one of Miller’s greatest numbers. The applause for both was long and loud.

Glenn Miller’s arrangement of the 1910 song, “St. Louis Blues,” followed, and the audience was then treated to “Little Brown Jug,” both of which evoked thoughts of a bygone era in the audience.

The Andrews Sisters may have made their mark back in the 1940s, but at Saturday’s concert, Darlene Shaw, Tiffany Drake, and Sharon Coffey did them proud by singing along with the orchestra to “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy,” “Don’t Sit Under The Apple Tree,” and “Oh, Johnny, Oh, Johnny, Oh.” I saw several people near me singing along with these classic tunes.

Next, the orchestra took us along on “American Patrol,” the stirring music making all patriots in the audience take notice. All five of the evening’s singers – Mr. Shaw, Mr. Dreher, Ms. Drake, Ms. Coffey, and Ms. Shaw – then sang the old war favorite, “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” bringing forth images of even older conflicts, the men who fought them, and the families who waited for their loved ones to return from war.

John Dreher then gave a moving rendition of “The White Cliffs of Dover,” the song that kept England’s chin up when faced with Nazi bombers. A salute to the Armed Forces followed, and veterans of each branch of the service stood proudly when their anthem was played.

As the orchestra softly played “Moonlight Serenade,” hosts Toni Anderson and Lynda Brock read a letter home from Charles Cowart, a LaGrange man serving as a medic in the Pacific Theatre during the war. Mr. Cowart’s letter described the horrors of war from a first-person perspective that made history seem real to those in attendance.

For the evening’s finale, John Dreher returned to the microphone to sing “God Bless America,” accompanied by the entire audience. Then came a special treat: Glenn Miller’s biggest hit, “In The Mood,” again sung by all five of the evening’s vocalists.

Finally, to a video montage of photographs of local men and women who served in World War II, Darlene Shaw and Toni Anderson performed the hauntingly beautiful, "I'll Be Seeing You." The audience gave the singers, the orchestra, and Maestro Cobos a well-earned standing ovation.

The evening so perfectly brought forth images of times gone by that, if someone had told me MacArthur or Eisenhower were waiting outside to brief the troops, I'd have believed them. All I had to do was close my eyes and I could picture Glenn Miller himself conducting his Army Air Forces musicians.

It seems a shame that conflicts since World War II have not had such classic musical accompaniment. Of course, it seems a shame that there have been more conflicts since World War II.

The Greatest Generation truly enjoyed the greatest music – and, for one evening, so did we.

### Jack Bagley

Jack Bagley is a news anchorman for TV-33 in LaGrange with over thirty years of experience in broadcast journalism and a middle-school history teacher for Meriwether County, Georgia, schools. He has been a resident of LaGrange since 1970.