

Villages Philharmonic Orchestra Delivers Beautiful End to the Season

The VPO performed an opera gala Tuesday night at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center as its season finale.

By KRISTEN FIORE
Daily Sun Senior Writer

The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center overflowed with beautiful instrumental tones and operatic arias Tuesday night, making for a strong ending to a strong Villages Philharmonic Orchestra season.

During the 2017-18 season, the orchestra treated patrons of The Sharon to holiday, pops and classical concerts.

For last night's show, the rich music was joined by the hauntingly beautiful voices of five Central Florida vocalists.

The 15 years of growth, accomplishments and music the orchestra has seen all are thanks to the influence of one of The Villages' musical legacies, Oscar Felio, according to Pasquale Valerio, director and founder of the VPO.

As he sat in his dressing room backstage before the show, Valerio was surrounded by a few members of his musical family.

From Simon Ramos, a percussionist who is a senior at Leesburg High School, to John De Paola, a trumpet player who has been with the orchestra since the beginning, the orchestra showcases a diverse group of musicians.

But their love of music and respect for their director is something they all have in common.

In reflection of how the 2017-18 season went, members of the orchestra said that it's grown and will continue to do so.

"This has been a year of many firsts and also an indicator of



Photos by George Horsford | Daily Sun

Anthony Ciaramitaro sings with The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra on Tuesday as part of the Opera Gala at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

the development the symphony will see under the direction of Maestro Pasquale Valerio," said viola player Yaniv Cohen. "We've expanded our reach and audiences by performing in multiple municipalities including Clermont, Orlando and Leesburg over the course of the season."

Ramos, who has been with the orchestra for three seasons, said that it was intimidating to join a group of professionals, but Valerio helped him feel

comfortable.

"I love performing because I get to play things I don't normally get to play in my band room," Ramos said. "Tonight we'll be playing Johann Strauss, and that's something I don't think I'd get to see on my music stand otherwise."

Another exciting part of the opera gala was the singers, according to Lora McPerson, who plays the oboe.

"They are the people [Valerio] chooses and works

with for many hours before he even brings the musicians in," McPerson said. "They are just amazing."

Vocalists Julie Batman and Samantha Barnes Daniel said that the orchestra is full of excellent musicians who have been very friendly and welcoming.

The singers also enjoy the



Julie Batman sings Tuesday with The Villages Philharmonic Orchestra as part of the Opera Gala at The Sharon.

chance to perform with an orchestra, they said.

"Any time as an opera singer that you get to sing with orchestra instead of piano, it's always a big deal," Barnes Daniel said. "Your goal is to sing with an orchestra."

Valerio said that one of his goals for the orchestra itself is to work more with students and young musicians.

Fourth- and fifth-grade students from Wildwood Elementary School attended last night's performance, thanks to support from Provenance Wealth Advisors.

The student outreach also is something that the audience of the VPO greatly supports.

"At this particular performance, they always have the young people in the audience and on stage, and we really like

that," said Laura Kammer, of the Village of Fernandina. "We love the energy."

Kammer's neighbor, Lisa French, said they've been to every performance the VPO has done at The Sharon.

"We're lucky to have it," she said.

"The music they've done has been more complicated and challenging," agreed Connie Madeo, of the Village of Collier. "It's really a pleasure to listen to."

The show was chock-full of music by Johann Strauss, Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini.

There are many elements to such a show — the instrumentalists, the vocalists, the conductor and the audience — but last night, with each song, they were one.

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