

New and Intriguing Facets

Christmas concert of USAFE Band in the Fruchthalle

It was to be expected, but it nevertheless turned into a moment that sent shivers down ones spine: at the end of the traditional Christmas concert of the United States Air Forces in Europe Band (USAFE) on Friday evening, the audience in the completely filled Fruchthalle rose in unison to give the performers on stage a continuous and frenetic standing ovation, well earned by the orchestra together with the Rheinland-Pfalz International Choir for their magnificent presentation.

Preceding was an over two hours long diversified music show with mostly Christmas compositions of different styles. Under the competent leadership of Richard M. Mench, the internationally renowned US Air Forces in Europe music corps stationed in Ramstein presented classical masterpieces ("Ave Maria"), German and American Christmas carols, Latin-American rhythms and fulminantly intonated pieces in Big-Band style.

With informative and quite witty moderation in German by the bass trombone player of the orchestra, Ben Huseby, the ensemble played its complex program from classical to modern at the highest technical and interpretive level. The thundering applause of the enthusiastic audience could be taken for granted.

Surprising moments were created by unusual interpretations of well-known pieces like "Auld Lang Syne", which was played in a captivating fast-paced and rhythmical version with Latin elements, or "Little Drummer Boy" presented in a Big-Band arrangement. While distanced from the low-key character of the originals, this revealed at the same time new and intriguing facets.

Special performances were brought to the stage by multiple members of the USAFE Band, such as singers Michele Harris and Jill Diem, who appeared impressively in the show's starter "It's the Holiday Season" and later in the classic "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer". For their technical and interpretive impressiveness, Flugelhorn player Dave Bell (in "The Christmas Waltz"), guitarist Johnny Kukan (agitating accurately and emotional to the finest detail) and cellist Justin W. Lewis, at the same time associate director of the USAFE Band, have to be mentioned.

Last but not least, vocal highlights were marked by the traditionally participating Rheinland-Pfalz International Choir under the direction of Stephanie Benton. Together with orchestra members and pianist Lothar Bendel, the choir with international membership and strong vocal sound crafted two longer passages of the concert with impressively executed works, of which the classical compositions, for example by Mozart, and the very emotional performances of the Christmas carols at the end of the program were especially memorable. The standing ovations after the crowning finale could be received rightfully and with content by all participants.

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