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Deanne Bryant conducts ISO Holiday Pops that seats Young Musicians with the Pros

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WGLT Interview with Deanne Bryant, Dec. 16, 2022

Charlie Schlenker: The Illinois Symphony's annual holiday show comes to Illinois State University tomorrow. The popular concert puts young musicians from across central Illinois on stage with the pros. Plus, celebrity conductor John Carter of Jack Lewis Jewelers ascends to the podium he will lead the hallelujah chorus. In this preview of holiday pops in the heart land WGLT correspondent Lauren Warnecke caught up with two of the maestros who will be leading the evening.

Lauren Warnecke: When it comes to Central Illinois' classical music scene Deanne Bryant is kind of a legend.

Deanne Bryant: I began with the youth symphony in 1995.

Warnecke: Bryant is referring here to the Bloomington- Normal Youth Symphony.

Bryant: following the founder of the youth symphony in 1989, I've been doing it ever since.

Warnecke: Prior to her role with Bloomington-Normal Youth Symphony, Bryant started the Unit 5 string program in 1969. She worked in the public schools for nearly 25 years. So this is technically her retirement.

Bryant: It's been quite a ride. Not one I anticipated doing, I was going to teach first grade and here I am.

Warnecke: Every year for the past decade or so the Bloomington-Normal Youth Symphony season has included a holiday concert with the Illinois Symphony along with several other regional music groups. Illinois Symphony's newly appointed assistant conductor Jacobsen Woolen says Saturday's concert in the Illinois State University concert hall is like a big musical family gathering.

Jacobsen Woolen: --and part of that is bringing together many of the ensembles in both of the communities that the ISO serve, so in Springfield and in Bloomington. So we'll have the youth orchestra which I direct joining the ISO for which I'm assistant conductor and we're also being joined by the Springfield choral society which I direct as well so it's really exciting for me to see. You know it's like when you bring friends together and you see them click and there's something so exciting about that and uh so it's wonderful to bring all of my bands together so to speak.

Warnecke: I've talked to some guest conductors recently that have been appearing with the professional orchestra and they talk a lot about the difference about being an at home resident conductor with an ensemble versus being on the road. So what about you Deanne like how do you keep it fresh and continue to work with these young people day in and day out.

Bryant: The kids are great that's the first thing, they're very dedicated, they're doing this because they want to play, to play with the Illinois Symphony I always bill it as you're going to

be sitting by people who get paid to play and that keeps it fresh to them because they really want to perform well knowing they're going to be next to someone like that. The challenge is to be sure the music is at the right level for their ability and also to match what the Illinois Symphony wants to play.

Woolen: One of the things I really like about working with youth orchestra is it allows you to think in a pedagogical way not only about how you want the people to sound but what about the musical skills that they need in order to make it sound that way and so you go a step further and you can sort of build up a foundation of musical ability and all the little steps that go into executing it the way you want it to sound.

Warnecke: But they are young people right? (laughs) Do you ever have any rabble rousers that just aren't into it? I mean.. no? you're shaking your head Deanne.

Bryant: no these kids are they're on board with what we do and here again they are doing this because they want to do it and even if they have a lower skill level they're still being mentored by the students that sit ahead of them and they're watching the bowings and trying to be as professional as they can and I have 20 new members in my youth symphony this fall. When it came time for the concert it would be hard to determine who those new people were because they learned.

Warnecke: Some of the audience may come to a pops concert having never heard these songs before (orchestra music plays) or they may be like I think I heard that in the grocery store once or on a commercial once because they're such frequently played pieces so how do we take those audience members and potentially those young musicians out there that don't know they're musicians yet to the next level to really explore the deeper repertoire.

Woolen: When you go to a concert it should be a visceral and emotional experience and my feeling on that is it's sort of a variant to build it and they will come it's that be it and they will experience it so if the conductor and the musicians can really deeply experience the music while they're playing it, if they can play with passion and with commitment and with emotion, that is infectious and I think that's really what hooks people cause they feel that coming off of the stage and it just activates something I think anyone regardless of how much you know, it doesn't matter how much you know but when you sense that it's just very compelling and I think that's what intrigues people and gets them to maybe come back and dip their toes in a little deeper and explore this amazing body of music which we all love so much and it's so gratifying for me to see with the youth orchestra for example people's eyes lighting up when they discover that they love this thing that I have spent my life loving so much. That's very gratifying and exciting. (Orchestra music plays)

Warnecke: The Illinois Symphony's holiday pops in the heartland includes Calvin Custer's Hanukkah Festival Overture, a nod to Viennese new year's traditions with the Blue Danube, Radezky March, Die Fledermaus Overture. Plus plenty of Christmas songs and audience sing-along at the end. I'm Lauren Warnecke.

Schlenker: Holiday pops in the heartland is at 7:30 tomorrow night at Illinois State University's performing arts center. Tickets are on sale at ilsymphony.org