Phantom of The Opera: Performance Review

On Friday, March 1st at 8PM, I watched Cameron Mackintosh's production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Phantom of the Opera at the Benedum Center. This concert hall is very large and can seat around three thousand people. There are two levels of seating, the main level and a balcony section. The Benedum Center was close to full this night and I was sitting on the balcony, stage right, towards the middle of the section closest to the back wall. The audience was in front of the stage. The performers were on a stage directly across from the main entrances of the hall. The Benedum Center is one of the most beautiful concert halls I have ever seen. The ceiling has concentric circles with octagons within the circles. In the center is a giant chandelier. The ceiling and walls have designs on them. The walls also have archways with curtains and lights on them. It is so luminous and gigantic when you walk in that is it a little overwhelming. I believe this group chose this venue because of its beauty, but also because there are a lot of famous productions put on here. Due to this, they have the equipment and stage needed for this type of musical performance.

Common to most musicals, the first song was the "Overture." The overture of any musical is, in summary, a quick preview of the songs throughout the show. This happened between the Prologue and Act I. It starts off with an organ playing a longer note, lasting around three seconds, and following are four descending abrupt notes, and then another long note. Next, the organ ascends, and this pattern continues for what seemed like almost a minute. Underneath this line of music, around fifteen seconds, are ascending notes in groups of four from an organ or something that sounds similar to an organ, in a higher range. These notes followed the pitch of the main organ that is playing the melody. For example, if the melody was just in a lower note, the ascending notes would be in a lower octave and vice versa. Next a percussion instrument starts making a constant rhythm. The tempo is a moderate pace. After the continuous pattern of the organ, it shifts to a different conjunct melody from the song "The Phantom of the Opera." This time the organ is being played in a very low octave. Underneath are still the ascending notes played by the organ in a higher range. After this, wind instruments take over and continue this melody and string instruments take over the harmony. The song ends by ascending, abrupt notes by the wind instruments. The texture of the "Overture" is homophonic. The rhythm is consistent throughout.

The next song is "The Mirror (Angel of Music)." This song is rather short and happens when Christine is in the dressing room and sees a phantom in the mirror. This song starts off with a timpani playing quick notes increasing in volume. The Phantom starts with singing an aria with bass accompaniment. Next Christine sings an aria with higher wind accompaniment. The Phantom sings next, but this time the whole orchestra is playing with him, the same thing happens with Christine. The tempo is moderate throughout and the melody is disjunct. There is a cadence and after this a string instrument and an organ play very softly in a high pitch that sounds eerie. The phantom appears in the mirror and calls Christine to him. The string instrument and organ fade out and the song ends.

The last song in the production was "Down Once More/Track Down This Murder." In this piece, the Phantom is taking Christine to his lair because she exposed his face. This is a vocal piece containing arias and recitatives. The Phantom starts off by singing an aria with higher notes and

the notes descend as he sings. Behind his vocals is the orchestra accompanying him. This texture is homophonic. A loud brass comes in and right after there is a cadence. After this rest, the tempo picks up and the phantom is singing in a recitative style. It is still descending and homophonic. After this there is a brief part of just the orchestra and once the Phantom starts to sing again, high ranged notes from the organ accompany him. The music slows down and he beings dialogue saying “Why?” After this there is a slight, high-pitched string instrument and Christine starts singing then the Phantom echoes her and another high female voice echoes her as well. There are piano dynamics here that continuously get softer. Christine then sings a recitative style alternating with the Phantom. Accompanying them is a slight, high-pitched string instrument. The Phantom changing to an aria of a conjunct melody, alternating with Christine. There is now a recitative with periodic wind instruments ascending quickly to build suspense. This is when Christine’s love, Raoul enters. Raoul sings a recitative. He is speak-singing to free Christine with occasional brass and wind instruments under his recitative. Next the phantom sings an intense recitative and the tempo picks up gradually. The pattern of this melody goes up and comes back down. Under his voice are dissonant string instruments. The tempo is continuously picking up, until Christine enters with an aria at a slower tempo. She is singing in disjunct motion with the accompaniment of string instruments. The orchestra comes in, the dynamics change from piano to forte, and Christine, Raoul, and the Phantom are signing line of music on top of each other making the texture polyphonic. The dynamics change from forte to piano. Christine is the only one singing now with the orchestra. She stops singing, and the orchestra continues to play. There is a break in music. There are string instruments getting progressively louder in volume and a lot of voices singing in monophonic texture in the background, while the phantom is singing in a recitative style. The tempo slows down and briefly stops. Music comes in that sounds like it would be from a jack in the box. It has a piano dynamic with bells and a slow tempo. The melody is conjunct, and it is a melody from a previous song, “Masquerade.” The Phantom is whisper singing to this music. The music gets really soft and he starts talking about love. The music reflects this emotion. There are no vocals, just the orchestra playing at a slow tempo in swaying motions. The phantom comes in singing and there are forte dynamics with a lot of emphasized brass instruments. The song ends with a series of two second duration notes by string instruments with the last one a having a longer duration.

They played this particular music because it helps tell the story and portray the emotions the characters are feeling. Each scene had a song within it, and this showed whether the emotion was love or fear or anything and it emphasized that emotion. The order of music is also for the reason that it tells the story. Each song helps move the story along and if it was not in order, the musical would not make sense.

The musicians interacted with each other because they were acting together to tell a story. They also were singing so they had to use cues from each other to harmonize together and cues from the pit to keep the right timing with the orchestra. The performers interacted with the audience often. The musical was about performing an opera and every time they would be performing the opera, we were the audience in the musical as well. More specific examples of how they interacted with the audience is when they were literally in the audience. The phantoms voice appeared throughout the hall, not just on stage. The director of the opera, that was an actor, physically stood in the audience. The audience interacted with the performers by laughing at their jokes, giving applause, or showing any emotion to their story. For example, before intermission, the Phantom cause a chandelier to come down toward the crowd and everyone reacted by showing the emotion of fear or even screaming. I believe these interactions were appropriate because we went to a show to be amused and feel some emotion.

Based on my observations, I believe the organizers were trying to portray a well-known show as a source of entertainment. The purpose of this performance was to showcase the performers talent of singing and acting but also to gain money for doing it. These people are professionals, and this is their everyday job. I believe the performers achieved their goal because this was one of the best musicals I have watched. I felt all different kinds of emotions and was very much entertained during the musical. Also, from the beginning, the hall they performed in set my expectations very high and they were met. I enjoy all types of musicals, but this one made me create a new appreciation for opera music.