

Sisters shine in homecoming

Harmons return to Columbus as featured vocalists with philharmonic

BY ELIZABETH NEWTON
For The Republic

The Columbus Indiana Philharmonic continued its season of bringing accomplished Columbus natives home to shine.

Saturday's program "Live from New York!" sparked with a variety of old and new Broadway favorites before a sold-out crowd at Columbus North High School auditorium.

Featured vocalists Marja and Chasten Harmon and saxophonist Cam Collins took the spotlight.

The CIP also was joined by a jazz rhythm section comprising Matt Peterson (piano),



CHASTEN HARMON



MARJA HARMON

REVIEW

Sam Hoffman (guitar), Anna Butters (bass) and Andy Smith (drums).

Sisters Marja and Chasten Harmon grew up in Columbus and got their start in the Indianapolis Children's Choir. Engaging, expressive performers, they have since established themselves on and off Broadway.

They were showcased on a handful of standards from the Great American Songbook.

Additionally, they each selected pieces from shows in which they have recently performed — for Marja, "The Lion King," and for Chasten, "Les Misérables."

Each a busy performer in her own right, Marja and Chasten rarely have the opportunity to take the stage together. They harmonized beautifully on several duets throughout the evening.

Saxophonist Collins' extensive résumé ranges from straight-ahead jazz to more modern projects.

He brought a warm, buttery tone and easy phrasing to his selections with the orchestra.

Currently based in New York City, he has attended Indiana University and the Manhattan School of Music.

Collins' solo features were drawn from "Charlie Parker with Strings," a classic set of recordings from the late 1940s on which the bebop pioneer — who normally played with a small combo — was joined by lush strings for several jazz standards.

The philharmonic perfectly pulled off the hip, slinky orchestration of Parker's uptempo version of Cole Porter's "What is This Thing Called Love?" while Collins cut loose in a bold, personal solo.

He described the rare opportunity to improvise over these arrangements as a "dream and an honor."

Highlights of the evening all appeared on the program's second half. Marja Harmon's strong chest voice was balanced by subtle dynamic range on Stephen Sondheim's remorseful "Send in the Clowns."

For Billie Holiday's "Don't Explain," the orchestra let the rhythm section come to the fore alongside a duet by Collins and Chasten Harmon.

The tune highlighted her sweet vibrato, not unlike Holiday's own.

The orchestra sans soloists offered lively versions of Leonard Bernstein's "Overture to Candide" and popular excerpts from "Wicked" and "Les Misérables."

The three guest performers clearly were honored to return to Columbus and perform for a welcoming hometown crowd.

But as anyone present in the audience would agree, the real pleasure was ours.