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Hamlisch, Klein, Arnaz prove irresistible

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The best part of the mini-version of "They're Playing Our Song," the climax of Saturday's pops concert in Kleinhans Music Hall, was watching the back of Marvin Hamlisch's head.

That was because comedian Robert Klein, in his irresistible yappy way, reminded us how the show, which was a success on Broadway a couple of decades ago, was based on Hamlisch's own romance with Carole Bayer Sager.

So as we heard the songs from the show, it was hard not to look at Hamlisch, and think: This is all about him! What can it feel like, having your own personal feelings laid bare for this big sold-out Buffalo audience to see? Hamlisch, planted on the podium solid as an ox, didn't seem to mind. But still.

The night was full of various kinds of drama.

Klein got about 20 minutes to himself for stand-up comedy and song, and it was great fun, even if it was geared frankly toward an older crowd. His opening song, about colonoscopies, brought the house down.

Lucie Arnaz, the daughter of Lucille Ball, was also endearing. Arnaz is in her 50s and looks fantastic. In a slinky dress, she slunk her way through "The Best Is Yet to Come," and it was marvelous. During the "They're Playing Our Song" drama, she turned out a hilarious dance. She inherited some of her mom's zaniness, that's for sure. But she had an attack of ditziness worthy of "I Love Lucy" when she introduced the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, with big bombast, as "The Buffalo Symphony Pops!" Right after that, she said, "I'm happy to be here in Buffalo! How often do you hear that?" Um, actually, Ms. Arnaz, with our July temperatures, most of us here have heard that several times today.

Arnaz and Klein played the leads years ago in "They're Playing Our Song," and it was a treat to hear them together again in those roles. And the show, while comically compressed, moved along with grace. Hamlisch himself did some of the narration.

"So they've found that their relationship wasn't as easy as they thought it would be . . .," etc. I am approximating. I would say that for Hamlisch, Carole Bayer Sager was not such a big loss. Her lyrics didn't live up to his bouncy tunes.

Hamlisch began the concert with a great medley of TV themes as well as a bouquet of songs from "A Chorus Line," including his own piano version of "What I Did For Love." He also played "The Way We Were." And a couple of rags from "The Sting." Hamlisch got a free ride with that one -- the main music was by Scott Joplin -- but the creative orchestrations spotlighted the jazz capabilities of BPO players. Perhaps inspired by the full house, Hamlisch was in rare form. He was out of control, especially in a monologue about how John Williams gets all the Oscars.

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