I went to the 36th Concert of the University Symphony Orchestra on Oktober 5, 2014.

I was never really a symphony person. I liked some music, but I was never interested. That’s why I wanted to take this course. I wanted to get more educated. My view of symphonies and similar concerts has been changed quite drastically. This concert that I went to was quite amazing, not just in skill, but in actual musical composition and in terms of what was happening on the stage.

Being a first-time symphony-goer, I had no idea what to expect or how to act. I decided to dress as formal as I could so I wouldn’t look like a farmer when I walked in. As it turns out, I was a little overdressed. The dress code seems to be business casual. I sat further towards the back so I could take detailed notes on what was going on on the stage and what I was thinking of the music.

The first thing I noticed was the menu for the concert, on which I noticed the name of the first composer, Leonard Bernstein. He was the person who conducted during the videos we watched in class. We would first listen to his Overture to Candide. This would be followed by Henri Vieuxtemps Concerto Number 5 for Violin in A Major Opus 37. This specific performance would be accompanied by Emma Carina Meinrenken, a violin player who got the silver medal in the 2014 Stulberg International String Competition. Then, there was to be an intermission, followed by Piotr Tchaikovsky’s Symphony Number 6 in B Minor Opus 4 “Pathetique”.

After reading the menu, I turned my attention to the stage. I noticed that the trumpets and brass instruments were all elevated on some form of stage. I think this was so that they could both see the conductor better and to have a more unrestricted sound getting to the audience. I also noticed that there was only a single tuba. I was surprised, as I used to be in a concert band in high school and there were many tubas and the brass section was massive. I think a symphony was designed to be more geared towards string instruments. On stage, there were only five or six trumpets, three or four trombones, and that single tuba I just mentioned.

Let’s get into the actual performance. About a minute before the conductor walked out, the lights dimmed. Then, the conductor walked out and was greeted to quite a lot of applause. He introduced himself as Bruce Uchimura, and then began conducting. The first composition, by Bernstein, wasn’t very memorable. I listened to the music, and it swayed me, but as with most music I listen too, if felt more like something I’d use to drown out white noise. It did start of loud and with heavy brass, but then the brass were quiet and the strings played more. At that time, I felt like I was about to dose off, but then it was already over. The first piece was only 5 minutes.

For the second piece, Ms. Meinrenken came on stage. At this time, I noticed that she wasn’t already on stage, and unlike the rest of the orchestra, she wasn’t dressed in all black. Also, at this time, about fifty percent of the members of the orchestra got up and walked off stage.

At this point, the conductor began conducting. I don’t remember much of anything about this symphony as I was mesmerized by Ms. Meinrenken. The stood to the conductor’s immediate left. She wasn’t sitting down like the rest. She seems to have memorized her part of the symphony. I immediately noticed that the wiggled around a lot while she was playing. It seemed like she was doing the motions of a regular violinist, but then multiplied the motions to an extreme. Also, her violin sounded incredibly scratchy, as if there wasn’t enough resin on her bough. Another thing I noticed is that Ms. Meinrenken’s part of the orchestra consisted mostly of what sounded like scales. There didn’t seem to be much complexity as it sounded like she was just running up and down notes on different scales. Granted, I could never do that because it was very fast and I can’t play the violin, but it wasn’t very impressive.

I did have a few questions that I wrote down regarding this specific piece of music. Why were there only strings playing? I noticed only four trumpets remained on stage after the first piece and those trumpets only played a few notes. In the notes I took, I wrote that I thought they only played something like 6 actual notes.

Then, there was the intermission, which was about 10 minutes long. I had enough time to talk to my friend who went with me and ask him a few question about what he thought so far.

Then, the lights dimmed again, and the conductor came back onto the stage. This time, the entire orchestra was back. I noticed during this piece that the trumpets sounded off-beat when they came blasting in. This made the entire piece sound a bit awkward. While it sounded a bit awkward, I noted the brass instruments where playing very weird. As I listened, it sounded like the brass instruments were playing separate notes of a melody at different times. During this performance, there was a big pause like it was done, but then the orchestra started playing again. I thought they were done, but it turns out they only finished the first part of Tchaikovsky’s symphony.

At this point, the symphony became a blur for me until it was over. The conductor turned around and bowed. He then walked offstage. Then, he came back on with Ms. Meinrenken, and signaled for the entire orchestra to stand and bow multiple times. The clapping continued, and the conductor signaled to each section to take an individual bow.

The performance was followed by coffee, tea, and donut holes in a small room. I decided not to stay as I didn’t know anybody to talk to besides my friend.

While I don’t remember much of the individual pieces other than what I wrote down in my notes, I did very much enjoy the performance. Since then, I’ve been listening to symphony music while reading and doing work.