

Arts & Entertainment

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Westchester Phil's fizzy cocktail of Loesser tunes

By DEBRA BANERJEE

There were no sugarplums, jingle bells, or boughs of holly — just romantic, witty songs by one of America's best composers and lyricists — Pulitzer Prize, Tony and Academy Award winner Frank Loesser. Westchester Philharmonic's Winter Pops concert with conductor Ted Sperling, titled "Anywhere I Wander: The Frank Loesser Songbook," on Sunday, Dec. 21, at the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College, gave the audience a refreshing break from the nonstop loop of Christmas music. Adding their considerable charisma and talent to the concert were soloists, the fabulous Christine Ebersole and Broadway's Cinderella and Prince Charming, Laura Osnes and Santino Fontana.



Laura Osnes

Although Loesser wrote what has ended up being a holiday classic, "Baby, it's Cold Outside" (it was written as a winter song and not for Christmas), and the wistfully romantic "What are You Doing New Year's



LAURA MARIE DUNCAN PHOTO

Ted Sperling

Eye?," the concert focused on Loesser's work from Broadway and Hollywood, "Where's Charley," "Guys and Dolls," "The Most Happy Fella," "How to Succeed in Business," and the film "Hans Christian Andersen."

Conductor Sperling said that Loesser's oeuvre spoke to the working man and pop culture and was jazzy and romantic at the same time.

Sperling introduced Jo Sullivan Loesser, Loesser's widow, who was in the audience. Loesser died in 1969.

Many of the songs Sperling chose were more obscure ones, but there were many familiar songs and highlights to savor: Osnes singing "If I Were a Bell," from "Guys and Dolls," and "I Wish I Didn't Love You So," from the 1947 film "The Perils of Pauline." Fontana led an audience sing-along to "Once in Love with Amy" from "Where's Charley." Ebersole gave an endearing performance in "Adelaide's Lament" from "Guys and Dolls."

Sperling joined the singers on

stage for a charming quartet arrangement. Osnes and Fontana sang the duet "Baby, It's Cold Outside," while Ebersole and the conductor sang "No Two People" from "Hans Christian Andersen."

Program notes indicated that the songbook tribute is "sure to elicit smiles and prompt memories."

At the after party with the performers and musicians, Westchester Philharmonic benefactor Eugene Grant described the concert as "A la recherche du temps perdu," using the Proustian phrase, "remembrance of things past." Indeed, with Loesser's treasure chest of tunes, Sperling, the musicians and the soloists recalled the romance and glamour of the 1940s and 1950s and offered a pleasant interlude on a Sunday afternoon.