

Our Band Does Play On!

End-of-Season Artistic Report for the Stockton Symphony

Peter Jaffe, Music Director, June 16, 2011



Artistic Excellence

Yet again, our Stockton Symphony has continued to deliver compelling performances of high caliber despite severe economic challenges. Our faithful and growing audience heard the orchestra excel in a season of elegant variety, including Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony, Elgar's "Enigma" Variations, Stravinsky's *Firebird*, and an all-Mozart program including the "Prague" Symphony and the Requiem, the latter featuring an outstanding collaboration with the Stockton Chorale. We'll be treated to an equally compelling array of repertoire this coming season, including two world premieres and many orchestral favorites.

In our Classics series, our guest artists continue to deliver stellar performances. Violinist Elena Urioste dazzled us with her Bruch Concerto, cellist Amit Peled transported us with his moving interpretation of Bloch's *Schelomo*, flutist Viviana Guzman took us on a virtuoso tour ranging from tangos to flutes from all around the world, and pianist Chu-Fang Huang returned to mesmerize us with her vibrant and consummate performance of Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto. Our roster for the coming season likewise features several knockout soloists of international repute.

For the third year we presented three days of back-to-back performances of our Steppin' Out educational concerts, with much of our increased student audience coming from Manteca. And, for the first time, *all six* of these performances were booked to capacity, hence we reached approximately 5,000 students in one week! This year's program, entitled "Construction Zone: Musicians at Work!," introduced several "building blocks" of music, including major instrumental forms, and our youthful listeners were well-prepared, attentive, and enthusiastic.

Holiday Pops sold out for the third consecutive time this past December, performed in collaboration with the Stockton Chorale and Youth Chorale and featuring tenor Eric Margiore, who stole our hearts in "Gesù Bambino" and gave us a broad chuckle with "Blue Christmas" à la Elvis. Valentine Pops presented works of Gershwin and Cole Porter, and was likewise a sellout. Our Pops & Picnic set new attendance records, presenting "Classical Mystery Tour" featuring one of the most prominent Beatles tribute bands. This was a most satisfying success. The move to the new venue at the University of the Pacific has continued to be refreshing, though we still have a few logistical details to conquer.

Due to excellent sustained marketing efforts, our ticket revenue has actually continued to grow despite the tough times. Our community still highly treasures the invaluable contributions we make toward our culture.

New Directions and Challenges

We are just about to launch a trailblazing teaching program, "Harmony Stockton," in partnership with the University of the Pacific, modeled on Venezuela's "El sistema." The potential for this program as an agent of social change is huge, and presents very exciting possibilities for our community.

Not only do we now have a successful Pops subscription series, but it's growing, both in terms of audience and number of events. This coming season we look forward to four exciting shows: a "Patron's Choice" Pops entitled "Behind the Mask," our Holiday Pops with Broadway star

Doug LaBrecque and the Chorale and Youth Chorale, Valentine Pops featuring Steve Lippia in “Simply Sinatra,” and “Oh, What a Night”—1960s billboard hits for our Pops & Picnic.

Despite these heartening developments, declines in concert sponsorship have taken a severe toll over a period of several seasons. This affects not just our Classics and Pops series, but other programs we had developed over the years. The City of Stockton has not been able to sponsor a July 4 event since 2006, lack of local support and attendance in adjoining communities led to suspending our spring Family Concerts, and this past season was the second that the San Joaquin County Office of Education couldn’t afford to support a Stockton Symphony performance in the Academic Decathlon. However, there are some recent hopeful signs of recovery. We were able to add an Outreach concert last September, we are currently in conversations that might enable us to bring back a family concert in a neighboring community, and we have expanded our Pops series by adding a fourth event. Our orchestra continues to offer vibrant performances at a fine level.

We must underscore the point that even in the economic downturn our ticket revenue has done well. As we all know, then, we must rejuvenate and refortify our fundraising strategies—we must cast a wider net for donations and sponsorships. I fervently hope, with our new successful Pops series, that we can stabilize economically and bring back our sixth pair of Classics Concerts—the Symphony board has affirmed that this is our long-range intent.

Commissioning New Masterpieces

For this coming 85th anniversary season the Stockton Symphony will proudly present two world premieres. Max Simončič—who has sent thousands of students to our concerts over many years—has just finished a marvelous and colorful accordion concerto, to be performed this November by world-renowned soloist Peter Soave. And for next March, we have commissioned composer Avner Dorman—who has had his pieces performed with the foremost orchestras worldwide—to compose a piece that will engage our community and youth. Based on a witty fable entitled *Uzu and Muzu*, the piece will feature two percussion soloists and narrator Webster Williams, whom we remember from his superb performance as the title character in Christopher Brubeck’s *Mark Twain’s World*. The project has a fantastic tie into the concepts of conflict and resolution, and we are in the process of designing community engagement projects built around these themes.

Making Connections in Our Community

We have continued the recent additions of intimate in-house concerts, this past season featuring marvelous mini-recitals given by Elena Urioste, Amit Peled, and Chu-Fang Huang. These types of events show much promise for the future, and we look forward to building upon these successes. In addition, we always try to involve our guest artists in activities while they are in town—giving master classes at Pacific and making visits in schools.

Last September our season began with the outdoor outreach event mentioned above, featuring guest conductor Andrés Franco leading a program of popular symphonic Latin works, occurring on a literacy day celebrating Hispanic culture. The event was most successful.

Collaborations

In an all-Mozart program this past November, we collaborated with the Stockton Chorale in the composer’s celebrated Requiem. The Chorale shone under their excellent new music director, Magen Solomon, and we all look forward to continuing our tradition of working together.

We have recently entered into a mutually beneficial working arrangement with the Central Valley Youth Symphony, and are delighted to resume a relationship that has been dormant for quite some time.

As mentioned above, we are launching the Harmony Stockton project in partnership with the University of the Pacific and United Way, and we also continue a fine relationship with Pacific in our successful Master Class series.

Outstanding Efforts by Key Players

Boundless thanks to Executive Director Jane Kenworthy, President Mike Whelan, all of our faithful board members, the Stockton Symphony Alliance, our beloved volunteers, and staffs both from the office and orchestra. Special tributes to Joanna Pinckney, who works tirelessly to staff our orchestra during challenging times, and to Jeanne Coburn, who, as our musicians testify, continues to provide the best orchestral librarianship around.

Orchestra Personnel

We bid a hearty farewell to three fine Stockton Symphony musicians: Associate Concertmaster Myriam Cottin-Rack, who has moved to Europe; Motoshi Kosako, who has decided to pursue his novel career as a jazz harpist with full intensity; and Second Trombonist Steve Menard, who has just accepted a teaching position in Louisiana. Each has made significant contributions to our musical community and educational spheres, and we wish them all the best. Our principal horn, Darby Hinshaw, will be taking a leave this coming season, but luckily we have an excellent roster of potential substitute principals. At the time of this writing, we are just about to have auditions for associate concertmaster and principal harp.

Our players continue to love the artistic aspects of our performances, but the basic needs of salary and the time required for commuting loom ever large. Our current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) provides for incremental raises—a remarkable step, considering the economy. This is not an easy time. Even despite the raises, our musician pay remains at the low end of the scale among orchestras in our class, and our board and staff remain aware of and sympathetic to this issue. We must all continue to work together earnestly, productively, and patiently to solve our mutual challenges.

Programs and Traditions

Several educational programs continue to thrive: Steppin' Out, Insights, Meet the Maestro, master classes with our guest artists at Pacific, and season previews at the Haggin Museum and O'Connor Woods. Continued thanks to Patricia Shands for her energetic initiative and coordination of the master class series at the University of the Pacific.

After over a decade of providing illuminating presentations in our Insights series, Moris Senegor has decided to retire from the project. We heartily thank him for his many years of fine dedication and love for our music, and he's assured us he'll continue to be part of the symphonic family. We are of course currently making plans to ensure that the Insights series continues to thrive.

This past season I continued the tradition of visiting several organizations for public appearances, raising interest in and awareness of our orchestra: several public service organizations, school events, Business Leadership Stockton, scholastic honor programs, and so on.

Revisiting Continual Challenges

- Orchestra personnel: how can we attract fine musicians to settle in our community?
- Donor development: how can we widen our base of donors and restore fiscal stability?
- Audience development: how can we continue to broaden and diversify?

Big Repertoire Dreams

- Stravinsky's Rite of Spring
- Mahler's "Resurrection" Symphony
- Messaien's "Turangalila" Symphony
- Berlioz's Requiem
- Strauss's "Alpine" Symphony

Guest Artist Dreams

- Violinists Gil Shaham and Hilary Hahn
- Cellist Yo-Yo Ma
- Pianists Emmanuel Ax, Yuja Wang, return of Olga Kern
- Singers Deborah Voigt, Renée Fleming, Cecilia Bartoli, Bobby McFerrin
- Special fundraising benefits: 1) "Violin Virtuoso Madness" featuring four high-level soloists in all sorts of combinations for two, three, and four solo violins; 2) Mozart's Double Piano Concerto featuring Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett; 3) A crossover evening with bassist Edgar Meyer

Organizational Dreams for the Future

- Sold-out houses—we've done it for some Classics and Pops, can we do it more often in Atherton?
- Using modern technology to increase our presence—internet, recordings
- Developing a Presentation Series with the Stockton Symphony acting as the presenter for smaller ensembles and acts
- Occasional concerts with "super-star" soloists (see above)
- Exploring alternative, imaginative sources of revenue (business ventures)
- Designing a few positions in the orchestra that would be closer to full-time positions
- Joint positions with Pacific faculty
- Touring—perhaps the next phase of an NEA proposal?
- Our own concert hall
- Using the Stockton Symphony as the studio orchestra for film scores

Future Focus

We know that we deliver artistic value—that we fulfill a cultural *need*. I believe that we are *exceptional*. We deliver a first-rate symphonic experience, and we need to keep reminding and educating our community what a fabulous treasure the Stockton Symphony is. In order to do this, we need to restore what our culture has lost over many decades—a *curiosity* and *enthusiasm* for discovering the wonders of symphonic music.