

FORGING AHEAD WHILE WEATHERING THE STORM
End-of-Season Artistic Report for the Stockton Symphony
Peter Jaffe, Music Director, June 11, 2010



Artistic Excellence

The 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 Gershwin's *American in Paris*, Ibert's *Escales*, beloved symphonies by Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky, and Respighi's *Roman Festivals*, replete with organ and offstage trumpets.

In our core Classics series, our fine guest artists continue to draw accolades. Audiences were transported by Alon Goldstein's wonderful performance of Beethoven's "Emperor" Piano Concerto, dazzled by Rachel Barton in Barber's Violin Concerto, charmed by our own principals Jennifer Olson and Motoshi Kosako in Mozart's Flute and Harp Concerto, and captivated by young David Requiro in Shostakovich's moving Cello Concerto.

For the second time 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. This year's program featured violin prodigy Stephen Kim, who had a most impressive effect on our youthful listeners. Holiday Pops sold out for the second time this past December, performed in collaboration with the Stockton Chorale and Youth Chorale and featuring lyric soprano NaGuanda Nobles. Our new Valentine Pops was likewise a sellout smash, featuring Broadway singers Teri Bibb and Dennis McNeil; and the "Hollywood Hits" Pops & Picnic was a most satisfying success—guest vocalist Ralph Cato was super-versatile in a broad range of styles, and the move to a new venue at the University of the Pacific was refreshing.

Due to excellent sustained marketing efforts, our ticket revenue has actually continued to grow despite the tough times. We all know that ticket sales make up less than half of our budget, but these strides are certainly significant, and tell us that our community still highly treasures the invaluable contributions we make toward the cultural quality of our community.

New Directions and Sacrifices

The new Valentine Pops enabled us to launch our first true Pops subscription series, and the results were highly successful and show great promise for the future. In addition to our traditional Holiday Pops, we look forward to an "Embraceable You" evening of Gershwin and Cole Porter in February and a "Magical Mystery Tour" with the leading Beatles tribute band next May. This coming season will begin with an outdoor outreach event, featuring guest conductor Andrés Franco leading a program of popular Latin music, occurring on a literacy day celebrating Hispanic culture. And discussions in tandem with the University of the Pacific exploring the launching of a teaching program modeled on Venezuela's "El sistema" present very exciting possibilities for our community.

Despite these heartening developments, declines in concert sponsorship have

taken a severe toll over a period of several years. This affects not just our Classics and Pops series, but other programs we have developed over the years. The City of Stockton has not been able to sponsor a July 4 event now for several years running; lack of local support and attendance in adjoining communities led to suspending our spring Family Concerts, and this past season was the first that the San Joaquin County Office of Education couldn't afford to support a Stockton Symphony performance in the Academic Decathlon. The net effect of all these factors, many of them beyond our control, is that in the 2009–10 season we had to offer fewer programs for our audiences and fewer services for our musicians than in any other season in over a decade. We of course made the correct decisions in reconfiguring and “downsizing” to preserve our organization—we still have an orchestra giving frequent 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, when our new Pops series becomes successful and when we can stabilize economically, that we can bring back our sixth pair of Classics Concerts—the Symphony board assured me last season that this is our long-range intent.

Commissioning New Masterpieces

This coming season the Stockton Symphony will be a member of a consortium presenting the premiere of a piece by Argentina's hottest composer, Osvaldo Golijov. For the following 85th anniversary season, Max Simončič—who has sent thousands of students to our concerts over many years—has agreed to write us a world premiere. In addition, we are exploring exciting possibilities of commissioning 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.

Guest Artists in Our Community

We always try to involve our guest artists in activities while they are in town—visiting schools, giving master classes at Pacific, and so on. In addition, this season Executive Director Jane Kenworthy spearheaded the development of two additional successful artistic ventures:

- 1) an all-Beethoven chamber music concert featuring guest artist Alon Goldstein, concertmaster Christina Mok, and principal cellist Drew Ford performing at a very high artistic level in Tillie Lewis Theater at Delta College
- 2) intimate in-house concerts, one again with Alon Goldstein, and another featuring cellist David Requiro.

Both types of events show much promise for the future, and we look forward to building upon these successes.

Collaborations

In an all-Mozart program celebrating Mozart's genius, this coming November we will collaborate with the Stockton Chorale in the composer's celebrated Requiem. The Chorale has just engaged an excellent new music director, Magen Solomon, and we all look forward to a new choral era in our community.

Outstanding Efforts by Key Players

The past season was often grueling, but also exhilarating at the same time. 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 two musicians who have each played with the Stockton Symphony for over two decades: tuba player Doug Hunt and third horn player Paul Kimball. Each has made significant contributions to our musical community and educational spheres, and we wish them all the best. Our principal trumpet player Brian Anderson will be returning after having taken a leave of absence this past season, whereas our associate concertmaster Myriam Cottin-Rack and our harpist Motoshi Kosako will both be taking leaves this coming season. At the time of this writing, we are just about to have auditions for bass trombone, assistant principal bass, and section strings.

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. The newly negotiated 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 among the lowest of 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. Many thanks to Dr. Moris Senegor for his frequent illuminating presentations in our Insights series; we are currently exploring the possibility of an alternate venue and/or expanding the series. Thanks also to Patricia Shands for her energetic initiative and coordination of the master class series at the University of the Pacific.

This season I added three new locations to the list of organizations I visit for public appearances, raising interest and awareness in our orchestra: the San Joaquin Historical Society, the Commons on Thornton, and the Woodbridge Del Webb retirement center in Manteca.

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: can we continue our upward trend and attain the lofty goal of doubling our subscriber base?

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, Yundi Li, 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 and in Spanos Center?
- 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
- Rebuilding endowment
- Joint positions with Pacific faculty
- Touring—perhaps the next phase of an NEA proposal?
- Our own concert hall
- Recordings
- 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*. 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.