

FULL HOUSE



Phil Houseal

Symphony of the Hills: An Unexpected Experience Article & Photos by Phil Houseal

Yeah, yeah. Going to a symphony concert means sitting sedately with a bunch of stuffed shirts peering primly through opera glasses, murmuring approval at the turns of the trumpet and the violinist's virtuosity.

Sorry, but no, that does not describe the Symphony of the Hills, which has announced five very different concerts this season at Kerrville's Cailloux Theater. Offering a creative calendar of concerts that appeal to a range of interests is part of the Symphony's DNA.

"I believe if you don't stretch your audience a little bit, you could end up playing the same old stuff," said Dr. Jay Dunnahoo, who co-founded the Symphony in 2001 and served as Conductor and Artistic Director for 14 seasons. "You should have fun when you come to a concert; it ought to be an uplifting experience."

That is the philosophy that brought to the concert stage such unexpected pieces as Switched-On Bach, "Buddy Holly" shaking to That'll Be The Day, classical guitarist Kevin McCormick playing Mannheim Steamroller, selections from Hair, and The Devil Went Down To Georgia, featuring a fiery fiddle duel between a first violin player and Dr. Eugene Dowdy.

Dowdy, now in his third season as Conductor and Artistic Director, has taken the baton and carried on the tradition of assembling a concert season that attracts sellout audiences.

"One of my favorite topics is 'how to program,'" Dowdy said. "It's a real challenge fitting pieces together in a certain way, when you have so many great pieces. That's one of the things having concert themes does: it lets you pull together diverse music that has a connection."

The perennial dilemma facing symphonies across the country is finding that balance between traditional classical music while mixing in the "pops" pieces that draw a more general audience. Dowdy embraces the challenge.

He checks off all the fields he is trying to present to the audience. They include nationality ("some American music, some from another culture"), time periods ("some modern, some tried and true"), tempos ("some fast, some slow"), and even emotions ("some tear-jerkers, some to get the heart pumping").

"I think of all the different emotions and human characteristics, then try to put them together in a way that reaches the audiences," Dowdy explained. "It's very important to me that people not only feel inspired, but also get a little bit introspective."

The theme for each concert this season is designed to tell a story, according to Dowdy.

"Wild Wild West" Celebrating America's Frontier October 12, 2017, 7:30 PM

"These pieces each show an aspect of not only our western geographical frontier, but also the musical frontier," Dowdy explained. "Erich Wolfgang Korngold came to America to escape Nazi Germany."



Alina Kobialka

"Gloria" Celestial Holiday Music December 7, 2017, 7:30 PM

"Rutter's Gloria is an absolutely fantastic choral work," Dowdy said. "But sometimes the holidays are about separation from family. That's why I include American Spiritual Festival. And of course I love every holiday to feature a Jewish piece, because so many are also celebrating Hanukkah."

"The Magic of Disney" Music from the Magic Kingdom January 6, 2018, 7:30 PM

The music from Disney is just an incredible treasure trove," Dowdy said. "How many of us first learned about classical music from watching cartoons."

"Old, New, Borrowed, Blue" A Cool Musical Blend February 22, 2018, 7:30 PM

"Pictures at an Exhibition is in the top five of every orchestra's list," Dowdy said. "It is an incredible piece, and will leave the house riveted. Each movement is a different picture, like walking through a gallery."

"Strike Up the Band" The Symphony on Parade April 26, 2018, 7:30 PM

"Many classical composers wrote for bands, so all the pieces on this concert show how orchestra music is inspired by band music."

Former conductor Dunnahoo always claimed that the Symphony of the Hills was a special gem, in that it is unusual to have an orchestra of this quality in a community the size of Kerrville.

The 80-piece orchestra is made of local and Hill Country area professional musicians and Schreiner University faculty and their advanced music students. In addition to a full concert season, the

group's mission is to expand the appreciation of music and develop the musical talents of young people. Every fall they present children's concerts for 1600 public and private school students from Kerrville and six neighboring communities.

It is all about adding another musical experience to the soundtrack of the Hill Country, one for music lovers of all ages, and from all backgrounds.

Current conductor Dowdy extends a special invitation to "first timers" to try out a concert this season. It will be an unexpected experience.



"We are all there together, experiencing live music by an 80-piece orchestra in this wonderful concert hall, just going at it live," he said. "It's something to behold."

Symphony of the Hills concerts are held in the 800-seat Kathleen C. Cailloux Theater, City Center for the Performing Arts, 910 Main, Kerrville, Texas. Information and tickets are available at www.symphonyofthehills.org/tickets, (830) 792-7469, info@symphonyofthehills.org.

About the Writer:

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