



SPRING/SUMMER 2008

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Touring musicians enjoy warmth from audiences— and from the Southern California sun

It was a fine tour, by all accounts. Seattle Symphony staff report the orchestra played “fabulously” for the April performances in Southern California. The four concerts were held in interesting performance spaces, before appreciative audiences, in Santa Barbara, Palm Desert, Los Angeles and San Diego. Renowned violin soloist Nadia Salerno-Sonnenberg, always a favorite with Seattle audiences, participated in the tour and brought concert-goers to their feet with Bruch’s *Violin Concerto No. 1*.

In addition, the trip offered the musicians a couple of vital amenities at a time when all Puget Sound residents were desperate for them: sun and warm temperatures.

Orchestra members were particularly appreciative of the flawless logistic support provided by Seattle Symphony staff, especially Manager of Operations and Public Planning Kelly Woodhouse. “She ate, slept and breathed the details for weeks before,” according to a fellow staff member.

The details included moving the 90 musicians to and from California by plane, and between concert venues in multiple buses. A 57-foot truck was required to transport the wardrobe trunks containing the musicians’ concert dress clothing, crates filled with instruments and music stands—and even the special chairs required by some players with chronic skeletal problems that are the result of spending many hours per day in asymmetric positions.



The view from the stage in Royce Hall on the University of California Los Angeles campus

The concert halls were much-varied, and their acoustics posed interesting challenges for both musicians and sound technicians. While rehearsals for the tour program were

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Principal Harpist Valerie Muzzolini practices before a concert, her feet happily free of cold-weather gear.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this issue are the work of clarinetist Larey McDaniel.

PHOTOS AT TOP: ROBIN BARTHOLICK (LEFT AND RIGHT-CENTER), DAN LAMONT (LEFT-CENTER AND RIGHT)



The spirit of the musicians

By Michael Crusoe, principal timpanist

Michael is in his 27th season with the Seattle Symphony and Opera orchestras. During his tenure, he has also been invited to perform with other orchestras when a temporary replacement timpanist was needed. These invitations have included the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, the Oregon Symphony and, most recently, the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C. Michael is also a part-time music faculty member at the University of Washington.

When the musicians of the Seattle Symphony formed our own union, as described in the article on page 7, it was a time of mixed emotions—concern, uncertainty, and objectivity—all generated by the quest for better representation and working conditions. The decision to do so has ultimately proven to provide a unique work environment as orchestras go, as well as opportunities that we perhaps would not otherwise have been able to pursue.

All of this, however, did not come without controversy, from within the organization and among my peers, as well as from our peers abroad. There are those among us in the orchestra who still question our decision today.

One of America's most-recorded orchestras

The most apparent effect of our change in labor status is that we became one of the most-recorded American orchestras, which in turn helped elevate us beyond regional status to one of national acclaim. And having made so many recordings affordable via concession (meaning we were not paid a premium in addition to our salaries, as other orchestras' musicians are), is without question one of the most significant financial and artistic contributions any group of musicians has ever made to their orchestra.

Forming our own union has also provided our employer with a unique option not available to their peers: they

have more flexibility under our collective bargaining agreement when unexpected labor issues arise, or when they want to explore new ideas for generating more revenue that may require a variance under our collective bargaining agreement; i.e., the Symphony has far less rigidity than is usually imposed under national guidelines. In other words, our employer has a little more latitude to explore options and ideas unique to our work environment.

Flexibility in solving scheduling problems

A prime example of this flexibility (and of the players' commitment to a more positive work environment under our collective bargaining agreement) occurred earlier this season, when Maestro Schwarz was presented with a unique and unexpected guest-conducting invitation. This invitation happened to conflict with scheduled final auditions for Symphony violin candidates that, in accordance with

When the scheduling conflict was brought to my attention, I called an emergency meeting with my fellow union officers to explore how, if possible, we could work out a compromise so the maestro could take advantage of the opportunity offered him, while at the same time fulfilling our organization's audition obligations to all those aspiring candidates who had already committed significant time and money in pursuit of a position with the Seattle Symphony.

To remedy the matter would require a variance under our labor agreement. Without it, the Symphony would have to cancel the scheduled auditions, which could have resulted in a national controversy in the orchestral world and perhaps even legal action from some of the invited candidates; or Maestro Schwarz would have to forego the invitation extended to him in order to be in Seattle for the auditions as required by our contract.

The outcome was that the players' union worked out a compromise, so the auditions went on as scheduled and Maestro Schwarz was able to accept the guest-conducting invitation without complications.

In conclusion: the players' union of the Seattle Symphony has a legacy of compromise and concessions, all in an effort to maintain a positive work environment based on mutual respect, and for the betterment of our organization as a whole. We will continue to do so, whatever our labor status, in the interest of the well-being of our organization. ●

"The players' union . . . has a legacy of compromise and concessions, all in an effort to maintain a positive work environment . . ."

our collective bargaining agreement, required the maestro's presence in Seattle to make the final decision on the winning candidate.

Back in the (former) USSR

Symphony violinist Gennady Filimonov plans to travel more than 10,000 miles to attend a very special event in September. What's more, he's taking a couple of Symphony colleagues with him. Gennady and the highly regarded odeonquartet, a Seattle chamber music group he co-founded, have been invited to Odessa, Ukraine, to perform at the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the School of Stoliarsky.

Gennady was one of the gifted children of the Soviet Union identified for his musical potential at the age of seven, and chosen to study at the School of Stoliarsky—an institution that has produced such luminaries as David Oistrakh, Nathan Milstein and Sviatoslav Richter.

The odeonquartet (their preferred spelling) was launched in 1999, with a goal of “featuring works that reflect the diversity of American and international musical styles.” In addition to music of Mozart, Sibelius, Ravel and other masters, the foursome's repertoire includes threads of tango, American prison blues, Persian folk music, jazz, and other widely divergent styles. Dozens of new works have been written for the quartet.

Gennady's traveling companions on the long trip to Odessa will be the other members of the quartet: Symphony musicians Artur Girsky, second violin, and cellist Walter Gray, along with Seattle violist Heather Bentley.

Remarkable chamber music expertise

The three Symphony musicians have a proverbial wealth of experience with chamber music. Gennady was a member of the New York Chamber Symphony and a co-founding member of the Opus One Chamber Ensemble in New York City, where he studied and performed before joining the Seattle Symphony in 1994. He has also performed throughout the United States, Europe, Japan and Southeast Asia.

Artur, who joined the symphony in 2006, was also one of the Soviet children chosen for an intensive music education: he studied at the Special Music School in Riga, Latvia, for seven years. As a young professional, Artur became concertmaster of the esteemed “Moscow Soloists” Chamber Orchestra under the baton of renowned violist Yury Bashmet.

Walter was a founding member of both the Kronos String Quartet and the new-music ensemble Quake. He has performed at chamber music festivals all over the U.S., and traveled to



Through the wizardry of software, the Seattle Symphony members of the odeonquartet stand in front of the School of Stoliarsky in Odessa, Ukraine. Left to right are cellist Walter Gray; first violinist Gennady Filimonov; and second violinist Artur Girsky. The fourth member of the quartet is Seattle violist Heather Bentley.

Croatia last summer when Quake was featured at a festival. In his 28th season as a Symphony cellist, Walter has also served as recording producer for a wide range of groups, including the Seattle Symphony, the London Symphony Orchestra, and the Northwest Chamber Orchestra.

Influences from Mozart to Led Zeppelin

The invitation to the special anniversary celebration stemmed from a trip Gennady made to Odessa a year ago: his first return since he and his family left the Soviet Union when he was 10. He visited his music school, and also met with Maestro Hobart Earle, an American who has been the principal conductor and music director of the Odessa Philharmonic since 1991. An additional invitation stemmed from his visit with Maestro Earle: in November of this year, Gennady and Artur will make a second trip to Odessa to perform Mozart's “Sinfonia Concertante” with the Odessa Philharmonic.

Fans of new music can hear the odeonquartet July 14 in the chapel of the Good Shepherd Center in Wallingford, where they will feature “White Dog/Black Dog,” a work for electric guitar and string quartet by Anthony Gatto. “Dog” is based in part on the opening passage of Led Zeppelin's famed “Black Dog”; when the piece premiered in New York City, a music critic lauded its “humorous and virtuosic touches.”

On July 18, the quartet will play at Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island, with a program featuring several premieres by composers from around the globe, including Russia and Africa. ●

Scenes from the Southern California tour

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Violinist Nadia Salerno-Sonnenberg (in white blouse) performs with the Symphony in Santa Barbara's Arlington Theatre.



“Every hall sounds a little different, and we always have to be prepared to make adjustments on the spot.”

completed before the players left Seattle, sound checks were typically held just prior to performances. “Every hall sounds a little different, and we always have to be prepared to make adjustments on the spot,” says Virginia Hunt Luce, a violinist who has participated in several Symphony tours.

In addition to classic Southern California weather, the other aspect of the tour perhaps most enjoyed by the musicians was the enthusiasm of their audiences. Many were no strangers to the Seattle Symphony: some of the orchestra's core supporters were escaping Puget Sound weather in Southern California, and they turned out in gratifying numbers to hear their hometown musicians. ●

Tours involve a good deal of “down time.” Cellist Robert Hansen Downey e-mails her family in Seattle before a performance, while Principal Trombonist Ko-Ichiro Yamamoto catches a few winks before the final performance of the tour.



Joshua Roman

Principal cellist launches solo career

The conclusion of the Symphony's 2007-08 season in mid-July will also mark the conclusion of Joshua Roman's brief but stellar tenure as the orchestra's principal cellist. Joshua joined the Symphony in the autumn of 2006, only a year after finishing his music education at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and has become increasingly in demand—internationally—as a soloist since then.

His May schedule was perhaps a foretelling of Joshua's career over the coming years. He played a recital in Singapore and then traveled to Japan, where he signed a recording contract with Japan BMG (Bertelsmann Music Group, an industry giant) and recorded his first album for the company. He then flew to New York for a concert before returning to Seattle to prepare for his solo role in Bloch's Hebraic Rhapsody *Schelomo* in late June.

Much to anticipate

When he announced his resignation, Joshua told his colleagues, "As much as I have loved my time in Seattle, it is very important for me to keep a strong focus and commitment to my

goals, and the foremost musical goal I have is to become the best cellist I can be. To that end, I will be doing tons of traveling over the next years, listening to many great musicians, practicing hard, performing a lot...

"I really appreciate the willingness of the Seattle Symphony to have placed so much faith in me at this critical point in my career. I will miss the many friends I have made here. Thank you all for an awesome two years! I'll be back!!"

And indeed he will be. Joshua already has firm commitments to play a "Delights of the Holiday Season" series with the Symphony in late November and early December. He will also perform with the Federal Way and Auburn Symphonies, the Northwest Sinfonietta and the Bremerton Symphony. In April, he will premiere a cello concerto by his friend Glenn Crytzer with the Northwest Symphony Orchestra.

Joshua will also retain his position as artistic director at Seattle's Town



Departing Principal Cellist Joshua Roman

Hall, and will play two or three concerts there in the coming year.

Members of the orchestra say they are both saddened by Joshua's impending departure and eager to see where his career leads him. They wish him the very best. ●

Departure of newspaper's music reviewer raises questions

A significant shift in media coverage of Seattle-area music performances occurred in May, with the departure of Melinda Bargreen from *The Seattle Times*. Melinda had been the newspaper's classical music reviewer since 1975. In an e-mailed note to the musicians, Melinda noted she was accepting a severance package offered by the *Times* to writers whose "positions are considered expendable," and added that "this is a tough time for newspapers."

Melinda said, "I'd like to say thank you for an incredible run of concerts with high points too numerous to mention. It has been a pleasure watching the orchestra grow and develop over this long span of time, under three different music directors . . . and in so many genres—from chamber music to opera. . . . I want you all to know the

tremendous respect I feel for all of you who have dedicated your lives to music at this very high level."

As violist Tim Hale notes, "Melinda has been a tireless advocate for musical performing arts. She is distinguished as a critic in part because it's a personal thing for her. She is a musician herself, and she has obviously cared about the musicians. She has been very approachable and genuine."

Since Melinda's departure, Symphony concerts have been covered by freelance reporters. "We're all hoping," Tim says, "that the papers will be able to continue consistently reviewing both symphony and opera performances. That's an important part of our visibility in the community." ●

Principal percussionist downsizes: from Benaroya to his boat

Randy Baunton says being chair of the entertainment committee for his grandchildren is his most important job these days, but longtime Symphony colleagues speak of his endless energy and dedication to *many* projects—especially his leadership of the effort to resolve the musicians' union problems in the 1980s. (See article on next page.)

Randy has “outlasted,” as he says, nine Seattle Symphony executive directors. He faced many of them across the bargaining table as chair of the players' negotiating committees, and felt honored when one of the directors publicly described Randy as “tough but fair.”

He was also at the helm, as strike committee chair, in 1977 when the musicians staged their first—and only, to date—strike against the Symphony. He remembers that period as “a very rough 10 weeks.”

Randy left the orchestra in February, which freed him to expand his roles with his family, friends, and community activities. He's also spending more time on his other avocation: boating. It's a passion that may actually be genetically conferred. Randy's great-grandfather was Simon Peter Randolph, a steamboat-builder and operator on Puget Sound in the 1800s. Randy's legal first name, Randolph, is in honor of the patriarch.

A career with broad impact

In his 54 years with the orchestra, Randy played multiple key roles. In addition to principal percussionist, chair of the orchestra's leadership, and labor negotiator, he was a teacher to many—including the other two present-day members of the percussion section. His legacy of many years of teaching percussion in the University of Washington's School of Music includes having former students in

three major orchestras, including the Seattle Symphony.

Randy joined the Symphony, then a part-time orchestra, while still a student at Ballard High School. His extraordinary sense of rhythm was apparent early on, and it played out in interesting ways—including his tap dancing for wounded World War II troops returning from the Pacific while they were being treated at the old Marine Hospital on Beacon Hill.

His initiative and leadership abilities also stood out at an early age. As a high school student, he organized a dance band called “Randy Baunton and the Syncopaters.”

Randy was only 18 when Arthur Fiedler visited Seattle as a guest conductor for the Symphony. “He asked me to come to his dressing room after the performance,” Randy remembers, “and I was concerned that I had done something wrong. Instead, he invited me to go on tour with the Boston Pops. We spent 30 days on a bus, and played 29 concerts. What an amazing experience for someone my age.”

He won admission to the Curtis Institute of Music, and then played briefly with the New Orleans Symphony before returning to Seattle to settle in as principal percussionist.

A percussionist for all needs

Randy has reveled in playing the many stand-out percussion parts over the years. Some, he says, were thrilling, like the snare drum in Rimsky-Korsakov's “Sheherezade,” the cymbals in Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, and assorted “choice” individual bass drum notes that “can sound like a string bass pizzicato, but longer.”



No longer scheduling his life around Symphony performances, Randy Baunton has more time for “messing around in boats.” The 45-foot Bayliner (called “Calando,” the music term for “slowing down”) is the most recent in a long list of watercraft he's owned. An important fact he's learned, he says, is that “ALL boats are ‘fixer boats.’”

An endlessly challenging responsibility of Randy's job was producing exactly the right sounds for specific scores and conductor's preferences. He and his colleagues were of course expert at the usual implements: instruments ranging from the full array of drums to bells, tambourines, cymbals and marimbas. When the need arose, Randy also devised unique “instruments,” some of which became legends as a result of his gleeful creativity. Over the years onstage (and in the Seattle Opera orchestra pits), he played everything from the cut-off end of a steel oxygen cylinder (hit with a Moleskin-covered plastic hammer) to a gong attacked with a Skilsaw for the death scene in Strauss' *Elektra*.

Randy's list of career highlights also includes the Symphony's 2004 performance in Carnegie Hall, and playing for some of the world's most famous conductors. Sir Thomas Beecham, Leopold Stokowsky, Eric Leinsdorf, Charles Munch, Dmitri Metropolis, and Igor Stravinsky are prominent in his esteem.

And, Randy emphasizes, his wife Janet—whom he met onstage—is at the very top of his “highlights” list. She was principal second violinist for most of her 38 years with the orchestra until her retirement in 2005. Theirs has been no ordinary marriage: “In addi-

tion to working together as musicians, Jan and I both had leadership positions in the SSOPO, and we essentially did nothing for 10 years but serve the orchestra.”

The stresses of musicians’ labor issues aside, “It’s still amazing to me

that I’ve had the privilege of working in a profession that was great fun from an early age, to do it in my hometown, and to do it in front of wonderful audiences. As a percussionist, it’s like I’ve been allowed to put the icing on the cake all these years, and I feel truly blessed.” ●

A brief history

The SSOPO: rooted in musicians’ input

Local control. It’s been a compelling issue since the days of the American colonies, and it was the primary need that drove development of the Seattle Symphony & Opera Players Organization (SSOPO) as the musicians’ bargaining unit.

Longtime Principal Percussionist Randy Baunton, who recently left his position behind the drums, remembers that the Seattle players were operating under a contract between the Seattle Symphony and the American Federation of Musicians (AF of M), which represented all American symphony orchestra musicians, when he joined the symphony in the early 1950s.

“It was a classic case of taxation without representation,” according to Randy. “We musicians paid hefty dues, but had virtually no input into our contracts with the symphony. Everything was decided by the union officials, who knew very little about our needs and issues. I remember an episode in the late ‘50s when the president of our AF of M local met behind closed doors with the Symphony manager, and then they came out and announced to the musicians that they had a deal. The players had no clue what was in it.”

Stepping up to change things

With a fierce determination to right what he thought was wrong, Randy turned out to be an ideal person to help lead the effort to change the union scenario. “Our battle cry was self-determination. The AF of M—like some of the huge labor unions—had to approve every collective bargaining agreement, and it would sometimes reject contracts even after the musicians themselves had accepted them.”

Randy and the other members of the orchestra’s leadership first tried to change the way the

union interacted with them, to no avail: proposals for more local input and control were rejected. While it was enormously frustrating, there were also some episodes of absurdity in the situation, Randy remembers. “When I told an AF of M official on the phone that we wanted to take care of ourselves here in Seattle, the guy said, ‘We couldn’t possibly accept that. Every orchestra in the country would want the same thing.’”

Stepping away from the union

As it became more apparent that the union and the Seattle musicians could not create a mutually acceptable relationship, Randy changed his union status by taking advantage of a little-known option to be only a “core member” of the AF of M. “It meant the union had no control over my activities; I was no longer subject to its punitive policies, like massive fines for failure to obey union directives. Core members pay their share of the cost of representation, but aren’t subject to the union’s rules and regulations.

“I was the first core member in the entire AF of M,” he remembers, “and then other members of our orchestra joined me as a show of support.”

The discordant note that ended the musicians’ willingness to try to find harmony with the union was played in early 1988, when the AF of M refused to accept the musicians’ choices for a negotiating committee to work on a new contract. Randy was the one member of the five elected to the committee that the union found unacceptable, at least in part because he was only a core member.

“Our battle cry was self-determination.”

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Backstage...

...is published in the community interest by the Seattle Symphony & Opera Players' Organization, the collective bargaining unit representing orchestra members.

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This newsletter reflects the input of dozens of members of the orchestra. The project is guided by:

Cecilia Poellein Buss, violin
Roberta Hansen Downey, cello
Joe Kaufman, bass

Virginia Hunt Luce, violin
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Your suggestions welcomed

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Musicians have had an eventful union history *Continued from page 7*

When the musicians insisted on their own choices for the negotiating committee, the union agreed to a rare meeting. But the players' requests were largely ignored yet again, and the full orchestra voted to separate from the AF of M soon after.

As might be expected in an organization with nearly 90 members, there was no unanimity in the decision to leave the union. Some players feared a loss of power without its heft behind them. But there had been so many episodes in which the orchestra members felt ignored—and treated like children, in Randy's view—that more than two-thirds were ready to try another form of representation.

Creating a new bargaining unit

Getting a divorce from a union is complicated, Randy points out, and the meetings and exchange of letters and requests between the musicians and the AF of M continued for several months. The musicians finally petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for certification, which required the employer—the Symphony—to recognize the Seattle Symphony Players' Organization as the musicians' bargaining unit. (That entity had actually been established in

the 1940s to advocate for the musicians. The "Opera" portion of the organization's title was added later, when the SSOPO became the bargaining unit for the musicians' work for Seattle Opera, as well.)

In the late '80s, Randy and his colleagues believed the SSOPO would become a model for other symphony orchestras around the country, many of which were struggling with the same control issues. That didn't happen, he says, in part because the union changed. It became more responsive, because its members could now see a viable alternative. "The AF of M revamped to better serve the needs and issues specific to each orchestra. We in Seattle forced them into it, although we didn't know it at the time."

Randy adds that some things have *not* changed in the two decades since: despite the AF of M's gestures toward working more productively with symphony orchestras, it continues to levy fines in the thousands of dollars against those who fail to comply with union bylaws, and the union continues to control the dues structure and expenditures for all its members. "That," he concludes, "doesn't exactly seem like local control." ●