

Orchestra Nova season scores a hit

BY JOHN LYDON
Contributor

Orchestra Nova, an ensemble on a mission to make classical music widely accessible, is about to start a new season, and its artistic director and conductor Jung-Ho Pak is excited.

Two series are planned: Nova Classics, with five concerts, and POPS!, with three.

In addition, there's the annual holiday presentation of Handel's

"Messiah" and a benefit recital with violin superstar Lindsay Deutsch.

Regardless of the program, audiences at Orchestra Nova concerts should expect an unusual experience.

Pak and orchestra have set the goal of "breaking down the wall between performers and listeners, the feeling that classical musicians are precious museum pieces under glass," he said.

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Orchestra Nova conductor Jung-Ho Pak leads a performance in 2009 at Qualcomm Hall.

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They mingle with the audience, for example, before and after concerts. During the performance, Pak talks to the listeners about the music, not dissecting it like a musicologist, he says, but "like a friend" telling what he loves about each piece.

And to get their message across, Orchestra Nova pulls out all the stops.

"Even in a traditional ... what we try to do is present it in an unusual way. With video — all of our concerts use video — and images to tell the story of these pieces."

There may be props or guest artists, such as dancers, possibly in period costume.

The Nova Classics series begins Oct. 15 (classics are held on a Friday and repeated Saturday and Monday) with a Mozart evening billed as the Austrian master's "very best." Considering the program, it should be a night to remember. It starts with the Clarinet Concerto, which has one of Mozart's most heart-wrenchingly beautiful slow movements; his last symphony, the "Jupiter," from start to finish an essay in graceful passion; and the "Don Giovanni" overture, whose beginning presages the terrifying descent of the opera's title character into the netherworld.

A salute to Vivaldi comes Nov. 12 with the "Four Seasons" concertos and a Concerto for Four Violins. Wedged between is a "tangoesque take on the 'Four Seasons,'" Pak said, by the Argentine composer Astor Piazzolla.

Just after Valentine's Day, on Feb. 25, a look at the many faces of love is planned. It opens with the subdued eroticism of Debussy's "The Afternoon of a Faun." Then comes an arrangement of a piece by the Brazilian composer Villa Lobos that will showcase the soprano Maria Lozano, a finalist in Orchestra Nova's "The Next Star" talent competition

in March. Finally, a piece by Schoenberg about a lover's forgiveness and another Wagner wrote to thank his wife for their son's birth, round out the evening.

On April 1 the orchestra salutes public broadcasting in a 50th anniversary celebration of San Diego's KPBS. The program includes music from PBS and NPR shows, some of it written by guest speaker B.J. Leiderman.

The series ends the weekend of May 13 with the "Victory through Peace" program. The best-known piece on the program is Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony," whose famous knocking rhythm at the beginning became a symbol for victory to the Allies and residents of occupied Europe in WWII because it spells V in Morse code.

The three multimedia Pops! concerts will be performed at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido.

"I take pops music extraordinarily seriously," said Pak. "For some people, it's their first introduction to classical music and an orchestra."

Pak said he programs pops concerts to feel like an "incredible variety show, not some old-fashioned, staid, soup, salad and entrée formula."

On Oct. 9, Nicolas Reveles of the San Diego Opera will host the Greatest Moments in Opera; Dec. 19 is the "heart-warming" Home for the Holidays; and April 30 brings "Travelogue: Around the World," with video and international performers.

Violinist Lindsay Deutsch will perform a benefit recital Dec. 22 at Irwin M. Jacobs Qualcomm Hall. The proceeds will go to Orchestra Nova.

"If ever there was an Elvis Presley of classical music, she throws her whole body into the performance," Pak said. "She performs with so much passion, audiences will fall in love with her."

Deutsch's program will include the West Coast pre-



Videos add a visual element to Orchestra Nova performances. SUSAN DEMAGGIO

miere of a violin and piano transcription of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." It should be a must-

hear for anyone interested in passionate, high-quality music-making.

Pak seems to think so. In

conversation, he repeatedly talks about the importance of taking risks, of passion. That, and cleansing classical music of some of its aloofness and ritual. They alienate new listeners.

"You don't know the secret handshake," he said. "You don't know when you're supposed to applaud, where you're supposed to sit, how you're supposed to dress. It's like walking into a secret society."

In fact, many fear classical music has become so aloof its days are numbered.

Does Pak?

"I think there's great hope for classical music if we answer the call of meeting our society more than halfway. To meet people where they live," he said.

Concert venues

Mondays

MCASD Sherwood Auditorium
700 Prospect, La Jolla
Tickets: \$35-\$45

Saturdays

Irwin M. Jacobs Qualcomm Hall
5775 Morehouse Drive, Sorrento Valley
Tickets: \$30-\$99

Fridays

St. Paul's Cathedral
2728 Sixth Ave.
San Diego
Tickets: \$22-\$60