

San Bernardino Symphony mixes Michael Jackson and Mozart

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By SHERLI LEONARD

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AP photo

Conductor Carlo Ponti Jr. wants the young audience members to learn from the San Bernardino Symphony concert on Sunday. That's partly why he added a musical tribute to the late Michael Jackson to the program.

"I always want a slightly teaching slant to the concert," Ponti said in a recent telephone interview. "With this medley, the audience will hear all the different parts of the orchestra working as a unit."

Beyond the teaching element, Ponti said the tribute to Jackson is important because of what Jackson meant to all audiences.

"He had an impact like no other celebrity," he said. "No one else has done what he did. He touched everyone, more universal than the Beatles. He had an electricity on stage that no one can duplicate. He was the consummate, instinctual artist."

The medley, arranged for orchestra by Steven Rosenhaus, features "Billie Jean," "The Girl Is Mine," and "Beat It."

"It's a short work, not too long, and very pleasing," said Ponti, adding that the medley has never been performed in the Inland Empire.

The concert will continue on the teaching theme with Ralph Vaughan-Williams' "Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis."

"With this work, the audience will see three mini-orchestras performing so they can hear the distinct differences between the instruments," said Ponti, who has received acclaim for the San Bernardino Symphony's program to take music into the public schools.

Another Inland Empire premiere will be "Toccatà for Six Percussions" by composer Carlo Chavez. In this piece, only the percussion section will perform, again showcasing the capabilities of specific instruments.

Soloist Eldred Marshall will perform Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 9. Ponti sees this finale as offering yet more teaching opportunities. "Eldred provides a wonderful role model for young people," he said.

Marshall, who began his piano studies at age 6, graduated from Eisenhower High School in Rialto and has performed internationally in Spain, Italy and the Republic of San Marino.

"Young people will get to see him and hear him play and know that here is a young person who has traveled the world," said Ponti.



Marshall said he loves to perform this Mozart work because of its jubilant and joyful character, and the beautiful drama of the second movement.

"This was Mozart's first major work, his first masterpiece, that moved him into his elevated status," said Marshall in a recent telephone interview.

Marshall, like Ponti, likes to use his music to educate youth. "Even when I was at Eisenhower, the chorus director Mr. Luna asked me to present music appreciation classes to my peers. Now, I like to work with small groups at schools."

San Bernardino Symphony

When: 3 p.m. Sunday

Where: California Theatre, 562 W. Fourth Street in downtown San Bernardino

Tickets: \$20-\$55, \$10 for students and military

Reservations and information: 909-381-5388; www.sanbernardinosymphony.org