

## California Philharmonic performs spectacularly different concert at Disney Hall

By John Farrell

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Usually, if you go to the California Philharmonic concert on Sunday afternoon at Los Angeles' Walt Disney Hall you hear the same program the orchestra and Maestro Victor Vener performed the night before at Santa Anita Race Track.

The same concert, but with better acoustics and air-conditioning. However, the pleasures of wine and picnic dinners are subtracted because Disney Hall is too formal for that relaxed atmosphere. The music is better, but the atmosphere is not the same.

This time around, the program presented by Cal Phil was markedly different, actually, spectacularly different. At Disney Hall, the program opened with a piece of "movie music," as part of Cal Phil's fourth concert of the summer season "Movie Masterpieces" — the stirring fourth movement of Camille Saint-Saens' Third Symphony, the "Organ Symphony," with Disney Hall's impressive organ under the guidance of organist Phillip Smith.

The excuse, if one were needed, was that the work was one of many featured in the Universal Pictures film "Babe." That was enough to qualify it for the performance, and it was a highlight of the afternoon. Smith played with technical aplomb and Vener led his orchestra with determination and more than a little skill. In a brief moment before the performance, Vener determined that most people didn't know the work (or even who Saint-Saens was). They do now.

Also on the program was Chaconne for Violin and Orchestra from "The Red Violin" by John Corigliano, played on a red Stradivarius originally owned by Felix Mendelssohn's family and now the proud possession of violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn, who has played the Corigliano work with the Cal Phil in a previous season. The Stradivarius is claimed to be the one the movie was based on.

The concert was Pitcairn's long-awaited Disney Hall debut, and she played with flawless style, with Vener making the most of the score, which features passages of lyric beauty and others of great passion.

"Pacific Vistas" by Cal Phil's composer-in-residence Roger Allen Ward premiered several seasons back at the then home of the Cal Phil, the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Gardens, but had its first performance at Disney Hall on Sunday. With the better acoustics, it proved to be a piece of real energy and more than a little complex charm. A tone-poem set in Pasadena, the three-movement work was rich and delicious featuring orchestral complexity and a delightful tunefulness. Ward got a great performance from his Cal Phil colleagues (he is the orchestra's director of marketing and grants as well as a composer).

Soprano Tara Alexander joined the orchestra for two songs from Disney's film "Frozen": "For the First Time in Forever" and "Let It Go" and was delightful, even if the lyrics of both songs were a little too modern to be considered classics.

There were other movie themes on the program including a set of Hollywood blockbusters theme songs like “Apollo 13,” “Star Trek Through the Years,” “Deep Space Nine,” “Voyager” and “Star Trek: The Motion Picture.” Vener also included the main title from “Pirates of the Caribbean: At World’s End” by Hans Zimmer and Ramin Djwadi’s music for the television series “Games of Thrones.”

Vener concluded the concert with 13 minutes of serious classical music: the “Introduction,” “Dance of the Apprentices” and “Procession of the Meistersingers” from Wagner’s “Die Meistersinger von Nurnburg,” played with plenty of brass and plenty of panache by the Cal Phil. It was thrilling and a glorious way to end the afternoon.

Vener also included a crowd-pleasing encore, a John Philip Sousa march in which he led the audience in rhythmic clapping from the podium.

*John Farrell is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer.*

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