Dewell Issue

Acadiana Symphony Orchestra
Change is in the Air for the ASO

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Change is in the Air

A New Season For The Acadiana Symphony Orchestra

By Jean Hurley • Photos by Danny Izzo

"I have been always looking for ways to bring music and people and places together. If you introduce true art, people will respond to it."

Musical Director Marcius Smoill, Acadiana Symphony Orchestra

"Salon Mexico." It is new music, so called, but not written last year; these compositions were created during the 20th century.

Even the traditional Christmas concert will have a distinctive twist. The opening of the new University Art Museum (UAM) and its exhibit, "Painting in France, 1803-2003, and the ASO's performance entitled "Christmas Around the World," have been scheduled to coincide on December 20. President George W. Bush, King Juan Carlos of Spain and French President Jacques Chirac are the invited guests. However, when contacted, Don Hill, the symphony's executive director said, "I've not had any confirmation that they will attend the concert."

Herman Mihire, executive director of UAM was more optimistic. "It's impossible to predict at this point, but Bush, Carlos and Chirac have been officially invited by the state of Louisiana to re-launch the tour of the Louisiana territory as it occurred on December 20, 1803, at the Cabildo in New Orleans, then visit us here for our opening."

And while the attendance of presidents and kings might be doubtful, audiences are ready for the change.

Smoill intends to spend time with his audience 45 minutes before each performance. "We'll talk together — why I've chosen to present a program this way," he explained. "I may point out what to listen for, especially the lower known pieces, and of course have a question and answer period."

Another interesting change in symphony planning is something called, "Family Concerts." It is a two concert ticket that Maestro Smoill describes as "casual and educational."

The first, October 16, is entitled "Sound Wives," is an exploration of melody, rhythm and elements of music; the second, next spring, has the intriguing title, "Stories and Legends."

Betty Kompass, immediate past president of the Acadiana Symphony, in discussing the master works schedule for next season observed, "I find a new maturity in the programming next year that I'm certain our audience will find entertaining and enjoyable."

Walter Dobie, president of the Acadiana Symphony Orchestra and Conservatory of Music Board of Directors, observed that there are numerous traditional identifiable composers interspersed within the concert season. "I don't see this season as being
that different or radical," he said. "In fact, probably 75 percent of the programming by Maestro Snodij will feature well-known classical composers." Delie refers to Chopin, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky; all featured at the first performance of the season, Sept. 20. The evening is called, "Passion and Drama." The concert includes Beethoven's overture to "Egmont," Op. 84, Chopin's "Piano Concerto No.1 in E minor, Op.11," and Tchaikovsky's "Symphony No.5 in E Minor, Op.64." 

The music director has taken pains to title each concert evening for a reason, explaining, "If an artistic offering of anything, whether music or a painting or dance, is portrayed as true art, and the artist is married to the performance, then there are no barriers to what you can do. I've covered the selections like an umbrella, posting a common theme." A good example is the Acadia Symphony Orchestra's November concert. The orchestra will present Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, with perhaps, the most well known theme ever set to music, then move to a mostly unknown piece entitled "Rapture," by Christopher Reas. And why? "One's musical legacy doesn't stand as contemporary or classical. Good literature doesn't stand between the artist and his audience. Both are there to be enjoyed, and so the audience will respond," said Smolij. "There is more classical repertoire this season as well. February's concert is a tribute to Valentine's Day, to some treasured and timeless romantic themes. Entitled "Symphonic Love Stories," the concert features selections from Berdiev's "Serenade," and Tchaikovsky's "Romeo & Juliet," as well as George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," performed by the Prairie View A & M College African-American Chorus.

On yet another Saturday evening, the orchestra will present selections out of the Vienna School — Mozart's overture to "The Marriage of Figaro," Beethoven's "Triple Concerto in C," and Schubert's "Symphony Number 9, introducing a totally different innovation, however; it's "A Night at the Opera." Chorale Academica is featured, and narrator has it that surprises might be in store in terms of scenery and/or costumes. The concept of currying some of the world's greatest operas is Continued on page 16

nothing now, in fact many symphony orchestras around the country are adding this kind of specialized programming to their repertoire, but it will be a first for the Acadia Symphony Orchestra. Such creative programming has a name; perhaps it is "panache," or "drama." At these words describe Smolij's style. Whatever it is called, the audience will soon become aware that the music director is a maestro. Smolij said he wants to "make this orchestra an important part of every sector of the community." He may be on his way to doing so, in just his first year as conductor.

Such connections are not a given, of course. To secure the trust and acceptance of his audiences, Smolij will have to share his own passion for the music. And that will happen, particularly when it is played by musicians who have the experience and credibility to deliver every ounce of drama to each piece of music they play.

The Acadia Symphony's recent music director, Xiao Lu Li, made a lasting impression on his audiences during his 10-year tenure. He gave the symphony the strength and muscle to play beautifully, and audiences loved him for it. Now the baton has passed to Marinus Smolij. Lauren Baker, ASO concert manager, said, "Because of Xiao Lu Li we have the luxury now of being where we are. He [Smolij] will bring a level of professionalism that we all appreciate and enjoy. His experiences in other places will be beneficial to us here, and that's so exciting to me."

At Smolij's press conference recently, Bill Hendrix, chairman of the symphony's search committee spoke confidently about its choice. "The committee was made up of a wide spectrum from the community, and while it took two years, and there were over 200 applicants, it was extremely rewarding, because Acadia had the opportunity to witness six of the finest conductors in the United States. It was a win-win situation for everyone involved."

Do you see the symphony being different under the baton of Marinus Smolij? Certainly. It must be. Art and performance cannot remain static. Do you agree. "Our new music director is going to do things we've never seen before, but Acadia is ready. We've reached that kind of artistic level."