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◀ Photo by Dwight Ueda

ALUMNI NEWS

Hector Salazar: Music Alumnus Takes the Stand as Conductor of Carson-Dominguez Hills Symphony

While in rehearsal for his debut concert on Feb. 7 as the new conductor of the [Carson-Dominguez Hills Symphony](#), CSU Dominguez Hills alumnus Hector Salazar (Class of '84, B.A., music performance) took a quick break from the stand to talk about how he chooses the music for his concerts. The evening's program included Camille Saint-Saëns' "Marche Heroïque, Op. 34;" "Peer Gynt, Suite No. 1, Op. 46" by Edvard Grieg; and "Carmen Suite No. 1" by Georges Bizet.

"I take suggestions from the musicians to see if there is something they haven't played in a while [that fits] the theme of the program," he said. "I like to introduce audiences to new works, like the Saint-Saëns [composition]. It's a composer everybody knows, but they don't know this piece. Of course, the second half of the program with the Grieg and the Bizet... those are just standard pieces, audience-friendly and a lot of fun to play. They're like comfort food."

The concert also featured the world premiere of a new contemporary work, "Timothy and the Magic Garden," a children's tale for narrator and orchestra with music by local composer Philip Westin and theatre educator Burt Peachy. Karen Sharp, host of KOST-103.5's "Lovesongs on the Coast" narrated the piece, a story developed to introduce young listeners to the instruments of the orchestra in the tradition of Sergei Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf." Salazar, whose introduction to classical music occurred while he attended Killingsworth Junior High (now Fedde Middle School) in Hawaiian Gardens, said that introducing children to music is "wonderful."



"It's wonderful to introduce them to a new piece, to tell a story, to watch their eyes light up when you show them a new instrument," said Salazar, who was born in Monterey, Mexico, and raised in Los Angeles. "You can see the little wheels turning. I remember that, because that's what happened to me. The L.A. Philharmonic came and played a concert for us and I said, 'Wow, I'd like to do

that.”

Salazar, who started out playing the trombone, was encouraged to try his hand at conducting, after having injured his lip in a car accident.

“When I severed my lip, I couldn’t play trombone for a while, so I played percussion,” he recalled. “My band director [at Cerritos College] asked, ‘Why don’t you try conducting?’ I thought it was kind of fun, you get to mold music the way you want, you’re kind of steering the ship. I like to give the musicians the benefit of the doubt and let them bring their ideas into the compositions. It’s a compromise. Sometimes I win, sometimes they win, but that makes it fun.”

The Carson-Dominguez Hills Symphony comprises members from throughout the local community as well as musicians from students, faculty, staff and alumni of CSU Dominguez Hills. Salazar was appointed to take over the orchestra from his former professor and mentor, Dr. Frances Steiner, who led the ensemble since its beginning in 1976. The maestro leads not only the Carson-Dominguez Hills Symphony, but also serves as the assistant conductor of the [Chamber Orchestra of the South Bay](#). Salazar has worked extensively in film and musical theatre. His film credits include music preparation and arranging for “The Big Brass Ring,” “The Apostate” and “The Sisters.”

A great fan of musical theatre, Salazar has conducted productions throughout the United States, including a highly acclaimed production of Kurt Weill’s “The Threepenny Opera” as part of the 2000 Kurt Weill Centennial Celebration at Cerritos College. In March, he will conduct a production of Stephen Sondheim’s [“Sweeney Todd” at the El Camino College Center for the Arts](#). In addition, he is a music and theatre instructor at Cerritos College, where he earned his associate of arts degree in music.

Salazar said that while the challenges of a musical career in today’s economy are greater, he is “optimistic about the arts.”

“Unfortunately, we’re falling on hard economic times right now, with the loss of many arts organizations,” he noted. “Opera Pacific just filed Chapter 11 last December, and many small orchestras just don’t have the funding anymore. So, we’re really grateful to the city of Carson for funding this concert and supporting us, and to [CSU Dominguez Hills] for continuing our partnership with them.”

Salazar, like many artists, takes on projects and performances throughout the musical community, working with a number of musicians whom he has known through his years in the profession.

“We all played in different organizations together [before],” he said. “The trumpet player, the gal playing percussion... we all went to school together. I’ve known them for 25 years. We’re like a big family, we all stick together.”

Despite the challenges of maintaining a career in music, Salazar said that the greatest reward he has experienced has been “the ability to express myself as an artist in my field and equally to share my years of experience with students, fellow artists and audiences alike.”

“I encourage everyone, young and old to enter into the arts with an open heart,” said the maestro. “In these difficult times that we live in, it is the arts that give us hope and a renewed sense of life.”

For more information on Salazar and performance dates, visit his website at www.maestrosalazar.com.

- Joanie Harmon

Photo above: Hector Salazar with Dr. Frances Steiner (center), emerita professor of music and music director, Chamber Orchestra of the South Bay, and Nancy Roth, concertmaster, Carson-Dominguez Hills Symphony.

Photo by Dwight Ueda



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