

SAN BERNARDINO: Symphony's family concert charms and educates



/CONTRIBUTED IMAGE

Frank Paul Fetta is the music director of the San Bernardino Symphony.

**BY SHERLI LEONARD
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San Bernardino's 80-year-old symphony orchestra is in good and youthful hands judging by the youthful appearance of most of the orchestra's soloists and by the enthusiasm of music director and conductor Frank Paul Fetta.

The orchestra presented the annual family concert Sunday afternoon to an almost full house, and through fine musicianship and careful programming, most likely brought thousands to classical music.

Prior to the orchestra's appearance, Sinfonia Mexicana's Mariachi Youth Academy came to the front of the stage at the California Theater for the Performing Arts and presented a marvelous serendipity to the audience. Polished, disciplined, and stellar in their musicianship, almost 20 young people dressed in impeccable yellow and rust traditional Mexican costumes gave a

remarkable show of engaging, infectious music, conveying the charm and joy of the mariachi music. One would have thought they were a professional ensemble. Not so - just dedicated, capable, wonderful young musicians.

Moving from Mexico to Spain to Russia to the United States, the concert featured the quintessential symphonic piece for children, Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf." Its charm and educational value for young and old and all folks in-between comes from a just-right combination of an intriguing fairy tale, clever programmatic music, and repetition of the musical voices, all delivered with smart timing, a trick for narrator and conductor to master. Master they did. Former San Bernardino mayor Judith Valles narrated in a friendly and totally engaging style.

The audience must have noticed the other critical element for the work's success: outstanding solo performances. Principal oboe Marilyn Schram, principal flute Patricia Cloud, principal clarinet Margaret Worsley, principal bassoon Carolyn Beck and a trio of horn players left no doubt about the fine quality of the musicianship of the individual performers with the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra.

Fetta takes advantage of every opportunity to teach about the music his orchestra performs. When it was time for the final piece, Carlos Chavez' "Sinfonia India," Fetta asked the instrumentalists to demonstrate some of the key instruments, most notably the percussion instruments and the timpani. He also asked the orchestra to play through short bits of the different motifs/movements to help listeners enjoy the work.

Mostly inharmonic, the Chavez work was filled with tricky rhythms which the orchestra neatly handled while they charged the piece with great energy. The musicians shifted neatly from almost-chaotic sections to the serene and simple motif of the Indian drum, clarinet, and flute - a relief from the whirling, swirling drive. At the end of the last movement, all percussion broke loose and principal timpani Bruce Anderson powered the piece to a frantic conclusion. The audience loved it, and Fetta reprised the final movement.

The concert's programming introduced new listeners to a spectrum of symphonic sounds: the fancy "Fire Dance" by Manuel de Falla, the early 20th-century classical sound of Prokofiev, the sensual and alluring sounds of Aaron Copland's Waltz from "Billy the Kid," and the drama of Chavez. Such music and such musicianship have the power to change lives, to direct young lives to engage in something that makes a difference for a better world. Bravo to San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra.