

How the San Bernardino Symphony is getting theatrical for 88th season opener

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The debut performance of a commissioned work, a nod to Halloween and a collaboration with a local theater troupe are among the highlights of the San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra's season opening concert at California Theatre of the Performing Arts on Saturday, Oct. 15.

Titled "Autumn Magic," the concert program features "Dancing Man Overture," the new piece by composer Libby Larsen that symphony conductor Frank Paul Fetta said is a five-movement work constructed like a violin concerto.

"It's very well-constructed, very entertaining, with snippets of many different works, including familiar tunes by Mendelssohn and Mozart," said Fetta, who begins his fourth season leading the orchestra. "It demonstrates myriad different composition techniques, and gives our concertmaster, Todor Pelev, a real workout, which he handles masterfully."

Pelev, who has been with San Bernardino Symphony Orchestra since 1993, will solo for the piece. In addition to maintaining a teaching schedule at Pomona College and the Idyllwild Arts Academy, he is in great demand for studio work in Los Angeles, according to Fetta.

"Todor is the best," he said. "We're so fortunate to have him lead our musicians. The Larsen work has very difficult passage work for the violin."

The entire 2016-17 concert season, the symphony's 88th, is titled "A Season of Firsts," and will include pieces performed for the first time by the orchestra, debuting guest artists and selections numbered "one" by great composers, according to a press release about the concert.

To pay homage to Halloween, the orchestra will perform Camille Saint-Saens' "Danse Macabre" and the Overture from Mozart's "Don Giovanni," an opera which, Fetta said, includes a ghost or two.

For the Mozart work, the Claremont-based Inland Valley Repertory Theatre Company will perform bits of scenes from their own production of "Amadeus."

"The company has done work for us previously by taking over the pre-concert lecture time to act out roles as the concert program's composers, in costume, talking about their compositions," Fetta said. "It's been another great addition to our programming by giving a broader look at what the music is all about."

The big work of the concert will be Johannes Brahms' Symphony No. 1.

"I've conducted this piece many times, and it's always a wonderful experience," Fetta said.

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