

San Bernardino Symphony conjures up a ‘Masterwork Melange’

By Michel Nolan , The Sun

COURTESY PHOTO Pianist Rufus Choi will be performing with the San Bernardino Symphony on Saturday in their “Masterwork Melange” concert at the California Theatre of the Performing Arts.

A melange of gorgeous music — fantastic elements from the whimsical to the sublime — will fill the historic California Theatre Saturday night as the San Bernardino Symphony presents its “Masterwork Melange.”

And voila, you have a feast for the senses.

Symphony Director and Conductor Frank Paul Fetta promises a performance to please palates.

“We’re serving up a very accessible gourmet program,” said Maestro Fetta, who chooses the symphony programs.

“You can serve up Rachmaninoff anytime, but when you hear Dimitri Shostakovich’s Sympony No 9 in E-flat major, you will get carried into it.”

The original concept of the piece, written in 1945, was as a grand celebration of the Russian victory over Nazi Germany in World War II.

Before it was completed, however, the composer redesigned his work, creating a much lighter, more jovial symphony.

In the final movement, the trombone, clarinet and bassoon — all buoyant and humorous — create a brilliant closing that will bring a smile to your face, according to the maestro.

The audience will know Shostakovich was having a great time.

Sergei Rachmaninoff and Engelbert Humperdinck are also on the menu.

The concert opens with the prelude to 19th-century composer Humperdinck’s operatic masterpiece “Hansel and Gretel, written in 1890 for the composer’s nieces and based loosely on the fairytale by the Brothers Grimm.

The full piece premiered in 1893 under the baton of Richard Strauss, who called it a “masterpiece of the highest quality.”

Acclaimed pianist Rufus Choi will then take the stage to perform Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor.

“Rufus Choi is a master teacher and studied with great musicians. He is a winner of the Jose Iturbi Competition and multiple other awards,” Fetta said,



Among the pianist's accolades are performances at the Salzburg Festival, Great Hall at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, the Seoul Arts Center, Los Angeles Music Center and Pasadena Ambassador Auditorium.

"I always enjoy playing music with people I like — people who've become friends," Fetta said.

He lives in Los Angeles with his artist/inventor wife, Susan. Their son, Raphael, is an actor living in New York City.

Fetta, who is now in his third year as conductor of the San Bernardino Symphony, is a world-class conductor, conducting orchestral ensembles for about 40 years.

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A New Jersey native, Fetta started his conducting career as an assistant conductor with the San Diego Opera.

He still coaches, accompanies and guides the careers of vocalists and instrumentalists, serving as organist at Corpus Christi Church in Pacific Palisades.

But the maestro admits his great love is conducting.

In addition to his work with the San Bernardino Symphony, he has been the conductor and artistic advisor of the Redlands Bowl Summer Music Festival since 1985. He is also the music director/conductor for the Culver City Symphony Orchestra and the Torrance Symphony, as well as the Marina Del Rey Summer Symphony, the principal conductor of the Nevada Opera Theatre, and continues in his position as conductor of the prestigious Zachary Foundation International Vocal Competition.

In his spare time.

Preceding Saturday's 7:30 p.m. concert is a 6:30 talk by "Shostakovich" and "Rachmaninoff," portrayed by two of the talented members of the Inland Valley Repertory Theatre.

Audience members are also always invited to stay for the post concert reception to meet the musicians and visit with other music lovers.

"I'm so thankful to be with these musicians and so happy to be with this symphony." Maestro Fetta said. "It is one of the treasures of the city and the whole Inland Empire region."

Military and student concert tickets are always \$10. Single tickets range from \$20 to \$55.

The California Theatre of the Performing Arts is at 562 W. Fourth St., San Bernardino. Both season and individual tickets may be purchased by calling 909-381-5388 or visiting the symphony box office at 198 N. Arrowhead Ave. Tickets are also available online at sanbernardinosymphony.org, and with limited availability at the theater box office the evening of the event.

Only one more concert — on May 28 — remains in the 2015-16 season.