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Conductor packs 'extras' into California Symphony's new season

By Sue Gilmore
Contra Costa Times

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Conductor Barry Jekowsky and the California Symphony have apparently discovered that shtick sells.

Having just concluded a season that incorporated high-definition outer space imagery and flamenco dancing into related musical programming, Jekowsky is announcing a 2008-09 season that will deploy, among other things, Russian handstand acrobats to interpret a work, the West Coast premiere of a symphonic tribute to the Grateful Dead and — we kid you not — a concert where everybody in the audience dons 3-D glasses to watch an "Astronomical Pictures at an Exhibition" video suite while the orchestra plays the famous Mussorgsky piece.

Jekowsky, in a statement with the announcement, explained the idiosyncratic programming as an outgrowth of last year's concert season, the most successful in the 21-year-old orchestra's history. "Based on our sell-out concerts and the feedback we received, there's no question that people want more from their concert experience," he said.

The season opens at 4 p.m. Oct. 12 in the Leshar Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek with Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings" accompanied by "body sculpturing" provided by acrobats Iouri Safranov and Nikolai Melnikov, whose credits include stints with the Moscow Circus, Barnum & Bailey and Cirque

du Soleil.

The program also features Van Cliburn gold medalist Jon Nakamatsu and the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 3 and Dvorak's "From the New World" Symphony, and repeats at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 14.

The rest of the season is as follows:

Jan. 25 and 27: Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite" and the West Coast premiere of Lee Johnson's "Dead Symphony," an orchestral reworking of 12 of the band's songs.

March 8 and 10: Violinist Stefan Jackiw and the Mendelssohn Concerto in E-minor, a second world premiere from composer-in-residence Mason Bates and Brahms' Symphony No. 4.

May 3 and 5: Copland's "Appalachian Spring," pianist Conrad Tao and the Ravel Concerto in G major and Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," with a video suite by astronomer Jose Francis Salgado of Chicago's Adler Planetarium.

Subscriptions from \$144-\$244 are available now; single tickets, \$39-\$59, go on sale in September. Call 925-943-7469 or visit www.lesherartscenter.org.

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