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### Art ventures

## Symphony to try San Mateo venue

Jeanie R. Wakeland

The California Symphony will try to get more bang for its bucks this spring - as well as test the audiences on the other side of the Bay - when it ventures to the San Mateo Performing Art Center.



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The 16-year-old orchestra will take that sure-fire crowd-pleaser, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, to the 1,600-seat Peninsula theater, which is nearly twice the size of its 785-seat home base, the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, in May.

The additional costs of taking the full-sized orchestra across the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge will be fairly low, says California Symphony Executive Director Stacey Street. Since the Beethoven work already is scheduled for two performances in Walnut Creek, the cost of paying musicians for rehearsals and performances are already budgeted. That leaves just the technical costs to cover.

This is an example of the Symphony's smart economics, which has resulted in a rare surplus while others arts organizations are slashing programs or shutting down altogether, as the San Jose Symphony did in 2002.

California Symphony actually came out with a modest \$37,500 surplus for the fiscal year that ended June 30, no easy task considering it started off \$67,000 in the red the previous year.

The staff cut back on mailings and marketing while the orchestra made do with a little less rehearsal time to cut costs by \$40,000.

Symphony board members went to the usual suspects - Bank of America, Wells Fargo Bank and ChevronTexaco Corp. - for \$10,000 donations, but also found angels in Ted and Elizabeth Schmidt. The Diablo residents contributed \$20,000.

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The orchestra has an unusually broad and savvy board, whose members include retired Longs Drug Stores Corp. chairman Stephen D. Roath, J. Craig Van Selow of Mt. Diablo National Bank and Michael Millman of Bank of America as well as Vintage Foster, publisher of the Business Times. And, for a bit of star power, add in St. Louis Cardinals general manager - and Danville resident - Tony La Russa and KGO-TV anchor Dan Ashley.

Selling concert tickets hasn't been a problem for the orchestra, which focuses on American music and young American composers. Subscriptions for the five-concert series sell out at a very comfortable 80 percent.

But even with its loyal audience, says Street, only about 21 percent of the symphony's income comes from ticket sales, compared with 40 percent to 50 percent for similar orchestras.

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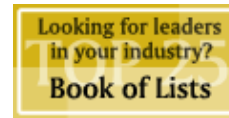
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