

The Pacific Chamber Symphony Expands to Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



The Pacific Chamber Symphony

Photo provided

Classical music in the United States suffered a decline in popularity during the last economic crisis, but it is slowly bouncing back, according to the 2014-2015 Nielsen music report. And fortunately for Lamorinda classical music lovers, Lawrence Kohl, the spirited director and conductor of the Pacific Chamber Symphony along with his orchestra, is about to open the 2015-2016 concert series in Lafayette, seeking to delight as well as enlighten audiences.

“When I compose a program I always want the pieces to play off one another,” says Kohl. “It elucidates something about music.” The Nov. 21 concert will start with the Overture of Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* bringing forth the light vein of the classical era music. The orchestra will then play *Beethoven Symphony #2* that was created in a time when the composer realized he was becoming deaf and stretched the bounds of what a classical piece is, moving toward romanticism and its heroic power. The third piece will be *Violin Concerto #2* by Prokofiev, who was a neo-classic composer at the beginning of the 20th century. Prokofiev adopted the lightness of classism within the post-romanticism movement that was

moving away from the excesses of the romantic movement. Prokofiev’s use of modern harmony adds irony to his neo-classic music.

“With these three works you are going walk away from the concert hall, whether you are a novice or an enthusiast, with some enrichment in term of what each of these pieces are about and how they relate to one another,” says Kohl. “It’s opening some new vistas for me, and that is something interesting and fun to share.”

While Kohl decides the program, the core group of the orchestra is involved in the discussion. Concertmaster and leader of the violin section, Igor Veligan, has been with the Pacific Chamber Symphony for six years and he had been talking to Kohl for some time about the Prokofiev concerto that he particularly likes. The unique atmosphere of the orchestra and its cohesive nature is part of what makes the group unique and why musicians such as Veligan are so dedicated to it. “This size chamber orchestra allows (us) to build a spirit of collaboration over the years,” he says, “like a tight family.”

Kohl decided years ago to create this type of chamber group to fit the audiences and the venues of the East

Bay, selecting the best musicians of the Bay Area. “These are people who play at the San Francisco Symphony, for the best recording studios,” he says, “only top notch artists that have worked with me for years.” Kohl first created the chamber orchestra of San Leandro in 1989. “When the times were good we performed in five communities: San Francisco, San Leandro, Napa, Walnut Creek and Pleasanton; and when the times were bad, we had to pare down,” says Kohl, who moved from San Leandro to Orinda and now lives in Moraga. Over the years the orchestra received many outstanding reviews for its work, which Kohl largely attributes to the quality of the musicians and the cohesiveness of the ensemble. The Pacific Chamber Symphony gives the audience the feeling of participating in a spontaneous interpretation. “This unique relationship is recognized as a thing of its own,” says Kohl. “Its personality comes out as the musicians and myself draw out the best in each other.”

The Pacific Chamber Symphony’s board is based in Livermore where active volunteers built a strong following. Now that the economy has improved, the orchestra has started to

expand again. “With the support of the Dean and Margaret Leshner Foundation we were able to expand first to Orinda, and now in Lafayette,” says Kohl.

The orchestra developed many educational programs for Livermore schools, such as the mixed quintet that performs at the elementary schools. “We do a series of very fun interactive educational programs such as postcards from around the world to illustrate different musical scales,” he

says. “By the end of the series, the kids are able to recognize by ear and name what is a major scale, a minor scales, an harmonic minor scale, a melodic minor scale, a pentatonic scale, or a middle-eastern scale.” Kohl hopes to develop a board of directors in Lamorinda and increase the orchestra’s involvement in his community.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit <http://www.pacific-chambersymphony.org/>.

Upcoming Pacific Chamber Symphony Performances at the Lafayette Library

Beethoven, Mozart, and Prokofiev

Saturday, Nov. 21, 7:30 p.m. at Lafayette Library
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Overture to “Le Nozze di Figaro”
Sergei Prokofiev: Violin Concerto #2 with Igor Veligan, Soloist
Ludwig von Beethoven: Symphony #2

Delightful Strings and Joyful Songs

Feb. 27, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. at Lafayette Library
Alessandro Scarlatti: Su le Sponde del Tevere for Soprano, Trumpet and Strings
Antonin Dvorák: Serenade for Strings

Majestic Masterpieces

April 16, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. at Lafayette Library
George Frideric Handel:
Coronation Anthems

Local Action for the Climate Summit in Paris

By Sophie Braccini



Wei-Tai Kwok, left, and Steve Richard want to do their part.

Photo provided

The United Nations climate summit, which will take place Nov. 20 to Dec. 11 in Paris, will include representatives from 195 countries (196 adding the European Union) who will work toward an agreement with individual commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emission. Sustainable Lafayette board member Wei-Tai

Kwok says, “This might be one of the most important international negotiations in our lifetime.”

Kwok and Sustainable Lafayette president Steve Richard have planned a series of local events to inform residents and to help them feel part of the international event. The two will share what they have learned about cli-

mate issues with the community in the weeks leading to the international conference, and discuss the importance of the upcoming Paris talks – what they see as the world’s first major step to reduce carbon pollution and address climate change since the Kyoto protocol.

On Thursday, Nov. 12, a few weeks before the launch of the

summit, Kwok and Richard will facilitate a Climate Talk where they will discuss the latest science on climate change and what is at stake with the Paris conference. The Nov. 12 presentation is free and will take place from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, 1035 Carol Lane in Lafayette. Both Richard and Kwok were trained at The Climate Reality Project, a three-day seminar led by Al Gore.

“I had never been in such a diverse international environment,” says Richard about the Miami training. “Top scientists were presenting to leaders from all over the planet, sharing knowledge and practices; it was exhilarating.” Kwok went to Miami in 2013 for the same training and presented an abbreviated version of his experience last year at the Lafayette Library.

For Richard, it has been an almost 10-year journey since the first time he saw Gore’s documentary, “An Inconvenient Truth,” in 2006.

“As (my family and I) were coming back from the theater, we discussed what that meant for us,” he remembers, “and the idea came to me of reducing our own carbon emission by 50 percent.” Around the same time he met Bart Carr, another passionate Lafayette resident, and together they founded Sustainable Lafayette, a movement that is now involved in many projects and

initiatives around the city.

Kwok and Richard feel that the Paris summit may be a turning point in the consciousness of world leaders, with the United States and China having both made public commitments to reduce their carbon emissions. “The purpose is to reach an international agreement for all countries with the objective to limit the climate warming to 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit),” says Steve Richard.

Two additional events are scheduled in the days leading to the summit. The public is invited to a buffet dinner to watch Gore streamed live from Paris to discuss how countries are being affected by the climate crisis, as well as solutions on hand at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 13 at T’s Firehouse Indian restaurant in Lafayette. Advanced tickets are \$15 and may be purchased online at sustainable-lafayette.org or \$20 at the door. Then on Saturday, Nov. 21, Sustainable Lafayette will participate in the Northern California rally of the People’s Climate March, a global solidarity effort in hundreds of cities around the world. Marchers will meet at Lafayette BART at 10 a.m. and travel together for the noon march at Oakland’s Frank Ozawa Plaza. For more information, visit sustainable-lafayette.org.