



PHOENIX SYMPHONY:

# *Hear the Music*

by Sarah Parkin



The strings vibrate.  
The horns blare.  
The woodwinds whistle.  
The bass drum booms.

Weave them all together with a talented conductor and the Phoenix Symphony springs to life. Playing the music of classical Brahms, popular piano legends Billy Joel and Elton John, and hosting award-winning conductor Marvin Hamlisch, the Phoenix Symphony has something for everyone

Founded in 1947, the Phoenix Symphony began performing a few concerts each year. Now in their 60th season, the 76-member orchestra presents nearly 300 events annually. They are proud to be the only full-time professional orchestra in Arizona.

Michael Christie, who became the Virginia G. Piper Music Director in 2005, is in his third season with the Phoenix Symphony. He believes in presenting the same music in different ways for specific audiences. "We have tried to adopt a variety approach to giving concerts. I'd like to think that the whole idea of audience development has been triggered and looked at in more focused way than probably has been done in the past," he said.

Mr. Christie has conducted orchestras around the world, including the Queensland Orchestra in Australia, City of Birmingham Symphony, Lausanne Chamber Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and the Swedish Radio Symphony. From 1996-98, he was associate conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic. In the United States, he has waved his wand at orchestras around the country, including Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Minnesota, and St. Louis.

### *The Audience Experience*

"We do a lot of different things with our audiences," said Christie. "We divide the concerts up into different kinds of experiences, so Thursday nights tend to be very much the standard orchestra experience. The audience arrives. They clap, we play, they clap, we all go home. Friday mornings tend to be much more conversational with the audience about the music. It is a shorter format. We play a little bit less music. It's an older demographic, because it's in the morning." Christie said Saturday nights are more of a multi-media approach,

with real-time program notes so people can follow along as they play. "We do interviews with all of our guest artists at the intermissions of concerts. So, we're trying to develop these really unique ways for people to experience a concert because everybody that comes to a concert has a different expectation," he said. "We take the exact same music and just present it in different ways."

The Phoenix Symphony offers a wide variety of programming each year including regular series of Classics, Symphony Pops, Chamber Orchestra and Family offerings, as well as special community presentations celebrating various holiday and local events.

### *The Classics*

Classics consist of selections by classic composers including Mozart, Debussy, Beethoven, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Tchaikovsky. These selections have stood the test of time.

### *The Pops*

At Pops concerts, the audience experiences Broadway standards, John Williams film scores, and the hip piano music of Billy Joel and Elton John. In January, the symphony will host special guest conductor Marvin Hamlisch. Hamlisch has won three Oscars, four Grammys, four Emmys, a Tony and three Golden Globe awards.

### *Family Concerts*

The Symphony created a special series of Family Concerts for families with children six to twelve-years old. Pre-Concert activities begin at 1:30 p.m. when ticket holders can attend the popular Instrument Petting Zoo to examine the instruments close up. Children can make a musical craft, meet musicians, shake hands with the conductor, solve musical puzzles, and have fun with balloon artists. In February, the Family Concert welcomes the nationally recognized group Classical Kids to present "Tchaikovsky Discovers America," telling the tale of the composer's visit to America in 1891. Excerpts from his music include "Swan Lake," the "1812" Overture, and the "First Piano Concerto."

### *Friday Coffee Concerts*

The Friday Coffee Concerts with coffee and socializing in the lobby before the concert have been a popular Valley tradition for over thirty years. Each concert is a version of that week's evening presentation and offers an opportunity to attend "Meet the Artists" luncheons following the concerts. At the luncheon guest artists and symphony musicians talk about their art, and a Question and Answer session follows with dessert.

Ruth Talbott has attended the Coffee Concerts with a group of friends for several years. "I think that the orchestra has improved every year that we've been going, which has been about five or six years. I like the way that Michael Christie introduces the music to us," she said. "It's been very interesting to hear a wider variety of music. When he first came, he introduced us to the didgeridoo, which is an Australian instrument that everybody really enjoyed."

Her husband, Dick Talbott, agrees. "I like the discussions before the coffee concerts," he said. "I think they add a great deal to our appreciation of the concert and to our understanding of what the artist of that day can provide to the overall picture."

### *Symphony Hall*

The primary location for performances is Symphony Hall, in downtown Phoenix. Phoenix Symphony Hall opened in 1972 and renovations took place in 2005. "It's much nicer now that they refurbished the building," said Ruth Talbott. "It's really great to have the extra aisles that they put in."

Symphony Hall houses an intimate art collection of international significance, including hand-blown glass chandeliers that are Venetian Light Sculptures. Four tapestries hang in the lobby, modeled after Navajo sand paintings, representing a renewal of understanding of the interlocking elements of two cultures. The Grand Drape, the largest piece of machine-made embroidery in the world, has warm, striking colors that symbolize rebirth, an appropriate description of the renovated Symphony Hall.

### *Around the Valley*

Beyond Symphony Hall, the Phoenix Symphony performs the Favorites series at locations around the valley, including the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, the Orpheum Theatre, the Mesa Arts Center and Pinnacle Presbyterian Church. These concert series explore light classics and popular favorites.

### *Special Events*

During the holidays, the symphony presents holiday music, including Baroque Christmas, Handel's Messiah, and a special New Year's Eve concert complete with Auld Lang Syne and a glass of champagne.

The Phoenix Symphony commissioned a special work to honor their sixty years of music and to celebrate the musical and cultural heritage of Arizona. In February 2008, they will present the world premiere of "Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio." Composer Mark Grey

created the oratorio as a musical composition for voices and orchestra telling a religious story infused with Navajo traditions. The piece incorporates English and Navajo language elements, western and Native American music, and contemporary and ancient narratives. There will be a special pre-concert discussion with Mark Grey and librettist Laura Tohe. At intermission, Michael Christie will interview participating artists.

"I've learned so much about the Navajo nation," said Christie. "And working with the Navajo nation filmmakers, also the elders of the Navajo nation. It's really a fantastic opportunity for people to get to know about the culture of people that were here way before any of us were here. It's really important."

### *Throughout the Community*

The Phoenix Symphony collaborates with the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department each season, presenting the People's Pops Concerts. Tickets are available free of charge at all Phoenix Public Libraries eight days prior to each event.

A series of free lecture-demonstrations feature individual musicians from The Phoenix Symphony talking about their lives, background, and instruments. Each one-hour "Close-Up" includes a question & answer session. The "Close-Ups" take place at Borders Books & Music (2402 East Camelback, Phoenix) and Mountain View Presbyterian Church (8050 E. Mountain View Rd, Scottsdale).

Target Music in the Park presents free concerts designed for music lovers of all ages and genres. The next presentation is March 9, 2008 at 2 p.m. at Steele Indian School Park in Phoenix. The performance celebrates local youth artists as well as the Phoenix Symphony.

The Phoenix Symphony's "Symphony for the Schools" and "Classroom Concert" programs provide an introductory and evolving concert experience for children. "One Nation" enhances the fundamental music education programs of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community's schools, building relationships between musicians and students. Symphony musicians teach music lessons to students, and the program provides Symphony performances at the Salt River High School. Armonía, translated as "Harmony," brings symphony programs to the South Mountain Village of Phoenix to support a culture of music appreciation.

Like the tapestries that hang in the lobby of Symphony Hall, the Phoenix Symphony weaves sound throughout the community, using music to bring people together.



Michael Christie

## ■ Upcoming Highlights

### *December:*

Handel's Messiah  
Baroque Christmas  
Christmas Pops  
New Year's Eve

### *January:*

Marvin Hamlisch  
Mozart, Debussy & Beethoven  
Beethoven and Meyer  
Dvorak's New World Symphony

### *February:*

Navajo Oratorio – Premiere  
A Musical Love Story  
The Music of  
Andrew Lloyd Webber  
Tchaikovsky Discovers America

### *March:*

Target Music in the Park  
Fleisher plays Beethoven  
Piano Men: Music of  
Elton John & Billy Joel

## ■ Contact Information

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