

ARTS & CULTURE APRIL 5, 2016 4:04 AM

Tacoma Youth Symphony plays alongside Tacoma Symphony Orchestra in a free Pantages concert

HIGHLIGHTS

Free concert April 10 showcases youth, adult musicians

Young musicians learn by playing next to professionals

Program includes Tchaikovsky, Rosauero, Rimsky-Korsakov



BY ROSEMARY PONNEKANTI

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The Tacoma Symphony Orchestra and Tacoma Youth Symphony will make history Sunday as well as music. In a Pantages Theater concert, the professional and youth orchestras will play Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade" side by side on the stage — their first time ever. The concert, which also includes Tchaikovsky and a marimba concerto by the youth orchestra, is free as a thank-you to the community.

For the young musicians, who get a two-hour rehearsal alongside their professional colleagues under director Sarah Ioannides, it's an invaluable learning experience.

“It’s a great honor,” said youth symphony director Paul Cobbs, who’ll be conducting the first half of the concert, in which the youth orchestra plays Tchaikovsky’s “Romeo and Juliet” suite and a popular marimba concerto by Brazilian composer Ney Gabriel Rosaura (with high school soloist Kellen Fenton). “The kids are really excited.”

“I really believe in supporting and cultivating our young musicians,” said Ioannides. “It will be a great experience for the audience, and for both the young and professional musicians.”

Side-by-sides, as they’re called, are fairly common throughout the country. According to a survey by the American League of Orchestras, 44 percent of youth orchestras and 58 percent of adult orchestras offered that experience in 2015.

The logistics vary, but in Tacoma the plan is to fit 46 symphony members and 42 of the youth symphony on the Pantages stage, sitting youth musicians next to the professionals that are playing their instrumental part. While the students have been learning the piece for weeks, Cobbs says the rehearsal and performance will teach them a lot about what’s it’s like to play in a professional orchestra — perfect, given some 40 percent have stated they want to achieve that goal themselves.

“They learn about consistency,” Cobbs said. “Most young people play most things well most of the time. They’re not used to 100 percent focus. As a professional you can’t let up — you can’t make a mistake and think it’s OK. In an audition, you make one mistake and it’s over.”

They’ll also learn more about nuance and dynamics.

Young people “may think they’re doing them, but a professional will do it so that the audience can hear it too,” explains Cobbs. “It sets a new standard.”

Other benefits include youth musicians playing alongside their weekly coaches and mentors, many of whom are symphony members, and playing under a successful international female conductor — invaluable for the young women in the youth symphony thinking of pursuing that career.

“They realize it’s possible for them to do it too,” Cobbs says.

And for the professionals, it’s a chance to feel that youthful spirit of enthusiasm, says Ioannides, who went through Britain’s youth orchestra system herself, but first experienced side-by-sides while assistant conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony in 2002. She’s visited youth symphony rehearsals already, and says she’ll keep the same conducting approach despite the different levels of musicianship in her orchestra.

“These musicians are really talented and experienced. I know they can handle this,” she says.

And of course the audience gets a free orchestral concert, with donations being taken toward both orchestras’ education and scholarship funds.

“It’s a win-win all round,” says Ioannides.

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THANK YOU TACOMA!

Who: Tacoma Symphony Orchestra and Tacoma Youth Symphony perform side by side, with soloist Kellen Fenton.

When: 2:30 p.m. Sunday.

Where: Pantages Theater, 901 Broadway, Tacoma.

Tickets: Free, but donations accepted. Get free tickets online at broadwaycenter.org.

Information: tacomasympphony.org, tysamusic.org.



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