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## Symphony Tacoma to debut Ott's "Fire-Mountain" this weekend

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**T**his weekend, Symphony Tacoma hopes to raise awareness of global climate change. Its new program "Classics V: Mountain and Sea" - to be presented 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 13, at the Pantages Theater – will include performances of Edvard Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King," from Henrik Ibsen's "Peer Gynt," and Claude Debussy's "La Mer."

It will also include the world premier of a new piece called "Fire-Mountain" by Daniel Ott, a New York-based composer and university professor (The Julliard School, Fordham University) with strong ties to the area.

"He's got a really thoughtful, unique and a very, very interesting, fascinating style of composition. Symphony Tacoma Musical Director Sarah Ioannides said. "The point of this piece is to bring awareness to environmental changes that our planet is enduring at this time and to really bring thought and reverence to the natural beauty of places like Mount Rainier."

Recently, Tacoma Weekly caught up with Ott to discuss his new work, returning to the Northwest and falling in love with classical music as a teen growing up in Puyallup.

**Tacoma Weekly:** From what I've read, you bounced around a bit as a kid before settling in the area?

**Daniel Ott:** Yeah, I'm an Army brat. We lived in the Northwest when my dad was stationed at Ft. Lewis which would have been the early '80s.

A couple of years later, when my dad was ready to retire from the Army ... we all agreed the Northwest was one of the best places we had lived. We had been living in Alabama at the time, and we just kind of picked up and moved across the country and hoped that a job would fall in place and a house, and it all did.

**TW:** You had some of your formative musical experiences here, presumably.

**Ott:** There were a number of things related to that that were important. Probably first and foremost was joining the junior high band. I was in seventh grade. I was at Ferrucci Junior High in Puyallup, and I had this amazing, amazing band director named Tom Anderson. (He was) such a masterful teacher and band director that really, really kind of lit a fire inside of me and a lot of my peers. We really wanted to work hard for this guy, you know.

A couple of years later, I joined the Tacoma Youth Symphony, and through that experience - like a lot of band geeks - you meet people who do that thing that you do and love; and all of a sudden you have a community. A number of people from the youth orchestra - I'm married to one (wife Erin Gustavson) - (are) friends that I'm still in touch with. We're sort of scattered to the four winds, but we all have our roots in the Tacoma Youth Symphony.

**TW:** Speaking of Ferrucci Junior High, didn't the bassist from Death Cab for Cutie go there around the same time?

**Ott:** Nick (Harmer) is definitely a friend from high school days. I had a lot of fun, actually, a year ago; Death Cab was doing Madison Square Garden, so Nick got me tickets to the show, and we got to hang out after. Nick is a great guy. He's actually a lot of fun to talk to about music because he has such wide-ranging tastes and interests.

**TW:** When was the last time you set foot in Broadway Center?

**Ott:** I can't remember. It's - I don't know - at least 20 years.

**TW:** So what does it mean for you personally to debut your latest work there?

**Ott:** It's a hall that I know really well. So I'm really looking forward to the sentimental part of coming back and (going down) memory lane. Beyond that, I still have musical contacts in the Northwest.

There are gonna people playing my piece that were my buddies in the Youth Symphony. There are gonna people who were younger colleagues of my mom (violinist Marcia Ott.) She's now retired, but she (has) colleagues who are still performing and still playing, for sure. It's a chance to kind of reconnect in a couple of those areas, so it's really special.

**TW:** There is an environmental theme to this show. How is that reflected in "Fire Mountain?"

**Ott:** The music itself is a musical depiction of Mount Rainier. If you think of the silhouette of the mountain, that's kind of what the emotional trajectory of the piece is like. It builds up to the summit with this intense, loud moment; and at that point everything changes and starts to come cascading down really quickly. You'll hear these kind of slipping, sliding sounds from the orchestra and the choir. That's really kind of the environmental aspect.

We have this beautiful thing we all love, this icon of the Northwest, and it's in danger. Certainly, the glaciers are in danger of disappearing at a rate that's alarmingly fast; and I would point out there's nothing political about this. This is just a fact. This is happening. What can we do? So the idea is to bring a little bit of awareness of that.

There is also a multimedia aspect to this: a film that is a collaboration with the Museum of Glass, and it includes a lot of mountain and glacial imagery, but also imagery of glass in the furnace. The idea of melting glass and melting glaciers is all kind of rolled into this piece.

**TW:** When I spoke to Sarah Ioannides a few weeks ago, that aspect of the project sounded as if it might still be in the works. Have you seen the film at this point?

**Ott:** "I've not seen it yet. But we did a fair amount of artistic planning on what will be the story and what kind of imagery we'll use at different points along the piece.

**TW:** What's the future for this production? Are there plans to perform it elsewhere?

**Ott:** My hope is, first of all, that the piece will be effective and people enjoy it; but also that it will have a chance to be heard again. So you'd have to talk more to the orchestra about that and see what their plans are. But for right now, we're sort of focusing on making a successful premiere and hopefully having an impact on the audience that is there on the 13th.