

An Informal Audience

The Cabrillo Music Festival is classic and casual

by Rob Pratt

IN MOST OTHER PARTS OF the country, you'd better get your tuxedo or formal gown together if you're going to attend a concert of orchestral music. And when you get to the hall, you'd better remember the conventions of audience behavior. Don't clap between movements; wait until the end of the piece when the conductor points the baton at the ground and then turns around to face the audience.

But this is Santa Cruz, and this is the Cabrillo Music Festival. Bring a lunch and hang out while the orchestra rehearses. Quiz the composers about what's going on with the tunes.

"With musicians who are new to the festival, we always get a call when they're packing and getting ready to get on the plane," explains Tom Fredricks, the festival's executive director, of the informal atmosphere. "We tell them not to bring their traditional formal wear because if they do, they'll be the only ones wearing it."

That's just the way the people who put on the festival want it. It's all about connecting with the audience, organizers say. The conductor, the composers and the musicians make up only half of what's happening. The audience does the rest, and that's what makes this festival so remarkable. It could only happen here.

"It's no secret that Santa Cruz is different than anywhere else," Fredricks says. "These are people who have found that the most important thing is to know themselves, to know their own voice. And they're not so much concerned with material things as with feeding the spirit."

Music Director/Conductor Marin Alsop came to Santa Cruz in 1992 knowing that the festival had a reputation for doing contemporary classical music and for having an audience that was enthusiastic about it. ("That was a novelty for me," she says.)

"I don't think anyone will have a really hard time accessing the music. When you hear Donald Erb's *The Seventh Trumpet*, it might seem difficult," she says of putting the works in context. (The festival orchestra will perform Erb's piece on Friday's opening night.) "But when you know the biblical connection — about the Book of Revelations — you know why the music is brutal."

"I like to introduce the pieces," she continues. "I hope it's not like a lecture, but it certainly helps me to know what it's about."

For Alsop, the music she puts together for the festival is about the American character. American contemporary classical music mirrors the nation in its eclecticism and diversity.

"There's an immediacy," she says. "What you see is what you get. Maybe we're not so subtle . . . but

we're certainly not obtuse. That to me is very open and honest, and that's something we can relate to.

"I build a menu around the few staples I know people already like," Alsop says. "As listeners bond with the composers after hearing repeated performances of their work, it's kind of like collecting baseball cards — you get to know the players."

"And with the orchestra, it's not so much about being a really good player as about being willing to try new things and not always having to follow the rules," she adds.

The informal trappings of the Cabrillo Music Festival date to the first concerts mounted in the early '60s at the Sticky Wicket Coffee House in Aptos out near the present site of Cabrillo College.

"The Sticky Wicket was the only place in the county where you could get Pocket books and a decent meal," remembers composer Lou Harrison of the origins of the festival. "Bob Hughes came out to study with me, and in short order there were concerts. Wherever Bob Hughes is, there are concerts."

With the opening of Cabrillo College in 1962 and the appointment of Gerhard Samuel as music director, the summer concert series moved to the college theater and took shape as a festival of contemporary classical music in 1963. But by 1968, Samuel's ambitious programming exceeded the



Sheryl Henze plays the *Pied Piper Fantasy* Saturday at the Civic.

festival budget, running up deficits and causing cancellations.

The festival further languished under director Carlos Chavez, who, though a well-esteemed conductor that the board of directors had enthusiastically brought to the festival in 1970, established a formal tone that just didn't jibe with laid-back local attitudes of the early '70s. When long-haired upstart conductor Dennis Russell Davies rolled into town on a Harley Davidson to interview for the position as Chavez's successor, the board knew they had found the right guiding spirit. Davies remained with the festival until 1991, setting down many of the freewheeling traditions that remain a part of the festival.

Festival Highlights

The Cabrillo Music Festival runs Aug. 4-13. Following is a schedule of concerts for the first week. In addition to the concerts, the festival offers open rehearsals, pre-concert dinners with talks presented by Music Director Marin Alsop and a two-day street fair Saturday-Sunday.

8 p.m. Friday, Aug. 4:

- Opening Night Concert at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium
- William Schuman: *American Festival Overture*
 - Richard Danielpour: *First Light*
 - Donald Erb: *The Seventh Trumpet*
 - Terry Riley: *The Sands*

8 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 5:

- Orchestra Concert at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium
- Joan Tower: *Sequoia*
 - John Corigliano: *Pied Piper Fantasy*
 - Christopher Rouse: *Gorgon*

2 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 6:

- Free Family Concert at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium
- Greg Smith: *The Orchestra Games*
 - John Corigliano: *Pied Piper Fantasy*

8 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 6:

- Concert at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium
- Solo Recital by the Kronos Quartet

4:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 10:

- Free Family Concert at the Henry J. Mello Center in Watsonville
- Greg Smith: *The Orchestra Games*
 - John Corigliano: *Pied Piper Fantasy*