

# The Marin Moment

*Cabrillo Music Festival*

*7-28-05*

## Cabrillo Music Festival begins with director Marin Alsop reaching a career pinnacle



A round-trip plane ticket from Baltimore to San Jose costs about \$400. Gas in a rental car to get over Highway 17 costs roughly the same — or so it seems these days.

For the subscribers, the patrons and especially the musicians of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, that's a golden investment for reasons that have nothing to do with escaping the summer heat.



**WALLACE  
BAINE**  
*Baine Street*

Baltimore's musical community needs to learn what we in Santa Cruz already know: that Marin Alsop is a creative, adventurous, passionate and talented conductor, programmer and leader.

Last week, Alsop made history when she was named conductor of the Baltimore Symphony, the first woman ever to lead a major American symphony orchestra. Around these parts, the news was hardly a surprise; we'd been waiting for just such an announcement for a few years now.

But it also means that the woman who has shaped the Cabrillo Festival — which begins Monday — for 14 years now will suddenly have a new

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### If You Go

**WHAT:** Cabrillo Music Festival.  
**WHEN:** Wednesday, Aug. 3, through Sunday, Aug. 14.  
**WHERE:** Various locations including Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, 307 Church St., Kuumbwa Jazz Center, 320-2 Cedar St., Santa Cruz and at the Mission in San Juan Bautista. Check festival schedule for details.  
**TICKETS:** \$20 to \$39. \$102 for festival benefit event.  
**DETAILS:** 420-5260 or go to [www.cabrillomusic.org](http://www.cabrillomusic.org).

**TOP:** Marin Alsop rehearses the Cabrillo Music Festival Orchestra at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium in 2003.

**MIDDLE, BOTTOM:** Flutist R. Carlos Nakai and pianist Paul Barnes will perform Saturday.

### More Inside

■ Complete Cabrillo Music Festival schedule of performers.

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# SANTA CRUZ STYLE

## Alsop

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level of media visibility, which could mean bigger and brighter things for Cabrillo as well.

Go ahead, choose your comparison: Jackie Robinson. Rosa Parks. Sandra Day O'Connor. Alsop's likely to wince at any of them, but they all have merit. Because of Marin Alsop, young women can now harbor ambitions to follow in the footsteps of Leonard Bernstein and Michael Tilson Thomas.

Alsop is the unlikeliest of trailblazers. I've interviewed her every year for 14 years now, and she's always been much more comfortable talking about music than about herself. And the whole woman-in-a-man's-world thing has been a wearisome subject for years.

But there she is, splashed across front pages coast to coast, featured prominently in Time magazine and National Public Radio. She was even named Person of the Week on ABC's "World News Tonight" with Peter Jennings.

"The media has absolutely gone wild with this," said Alsop, by phone from London. "The

classical world has just gone berserk. I don't think I've ever seen anything like it in classical music."

Her temperament is modest, unassuming, casual. In fact, the gender issue overshadows a potentially more important aspect of Alsop's Baltimore appointment. She represents a turning tide in the higher reaches of American classical music, away from the, shall we say, "snooty" old Europeans that have dominated the field for years to younger, less doctrinaire and class-conscious American-born conductors.

But, said Los Angeles Times classical-music beat writer Mark Swed, it would be wrong to assume that Alsop represents some kind of radical turn towards the avant garde in Baltimore.

"She really likes doing the standard repertoire," said Swed. "She really has a passion for it, and she rebels against the stereotype that she's all about contemporary work and new stuff."

Alsop agrees, calling the standard repertoire her "specialty," making it highly unlikely that she'll program Frank Zappa (a native of Baltimore, in fact) at her new gig

like she's doing this summer at Cabrillo (Frank Zappa's "Be-Bop Tango" will be presented at Friday night's concert).

Even after the Baltimore announcement, Alsop renewed her commitment to Cabrillo, one of the longest-running of her many commitments. The Baltimore Symphony, like many other big-city symphonies today, is in debt, making a more conservative approach likely. That, however, is exactly to Alsop's liking, giving her a best-of-both-worlds situation. She can savor the standard canon in Baltimore and she can use Cabrillo as a kind of laboratory for her more adventurous tastes.

As for the effect her suddenly high visibility might have on the Cabrillo Music Festival, ABC's Person of the Week says she likes Cabrillo just as it is. The festival already attracts many of the most talented composers and players in the world. As for the notion that the national/international media might pay closer attention to what goes on at Cabrillo, Alsop says, "There can be too much hype, and sometimes the media is interested in the wrong things."

That's probably a reference to the media-generated controversy

that surrounded Alsop's appointment in Baltimore. A majority of the musicians of the BSO protested Alsop's selection for reasons that had little to do with Alsop herself and everything to do with what they say as a process that ignored their input.

Alsop promptly met with the musicians and defused the situation. Still the media coverage focused on the controversy and the gender issue in equal measure. Neither approach was something Alsop savored.

Still, she's thrilled at the possibilities that await in Baltimore. During her time in Baltimore last week to meet the media and her musicians, she experienced one of the surreal byproducts of sudden fame. She was riding in a cab when the driver asked what she did for a living. Alsop said she was a musician, prompting the driver to exclaim, "Did you hear about our new conductor?"

"I didn't say, 'Well, that's me,' but the fact that that cab driver couldn't wait for the upcoming season made me very excited."

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