

# SR Symphony opens in new venue

By Diane Peterson |

Wednesday, October 3, 2012



Members of the Santa Rosa Symphony's Orchestra. (BETH SCHLANKER/ The Press Democrat)

When the Santa Rosa Symphony opens its inaugural season at Weill Hall this weekend, the orchestra will be testing the range of their new home with works that span the 18th, 19th and 21st century.

“What I tried to do this season was to explore the new, acoustic capacities of the hall,” said Music Director Bruno Ferrandis. “I’m testing the hall, like I would test an instrument.”

The eclectic program, centered on a world premiere by Bay Area composer Edmund Campion, offers a little bit of everything: Big sound (Mahler’s Symphony No. 1), a blend of electronic and acoustic sound (the world premiere) and a work symbolizing initiation (Mozart’s Overture to “The Magic Flute,” inspired by the rites of the Masonic order.)

The operatic overture will mark the sacred ritual of the orchestra stepping over the threshold into a new hall and a new era.

“This is a big moment for me and for us,” Ferrandis said. “If we are good in that moment, the future will look promising ...if we aren’t, we are in trouble, because of all that is at stake.”

Those who enjoy the ritual of live music will have plenty to savor this season. During their seven-concert Classical Season, Ferrandis has woven together a wide range of cutting-edge contemporary music and appealing classics.

“There’s plenty of offerings for everyone, and great soloists,” Ferrandis said. “Everyone is really psyched.”



Kronos Quartet

The conductor is particularly excited to open the season alongside the Bay Area's own Kronos Quartet, who will perform Champion's Concerto for String Quartet, Orchestra and Electronics, "The Last Internal Combustion Engine," with the symphony this weekend.

"We are incredibly lucky to have them," he said. "They are the most famous quartet performing the contemporary repertoire in the world."



Bruno Ferrandis, music director and conductor of the Santa Rosa Symphony (John Burgess/PD)

During the challenging work, Ferrandis will have to synchronize the acoustic orchestras with an electronic computer tape, generated by an onstage keyboardist.

"It will be quite an experience for everybody, and new sounds that you've never heard before," he said. "I really want to hear that live."

Other works programmed to test the hall include the bombastic "Symphonie Fantastique" by Hector Berlioz in November, and Dmitri Shostakovich's virtuoso Symphony No. 10 in May. On a quieter note, Anton Webern's Passacaglia for Orchestra in February will require utter clarity and transparency.

In December, the orchestra will be pitting two Titans of Opera against each other – Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi — with singers performing arias and choruses from their most famous operas.

“It’s a big project, to mix ‘The Ring’ with the best of Verdi,” Ferrandis said. “It’s going to be very tough.”

Krzysztof Penderecki’s “The Awakening of Joseph,” featured in Stanley Kubrick’s 1980 horror film “The Shining,” will reverberate through the shoebox-shaped hall in March.

“The piece is incredible,” Ferrandis said. “Acoustically, you have the eerie sound of the Ocarina, an Andean pipe, which sounds like a whistle.”

Guest pianists include the young Russian star Olga Kern, performing Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 in May, and French veteran Jean-Philippe Collard taking on a sparkling Saint-Saens concerto in November.

“He’s very bubbly and very French,” Ferrandis said. “And it’s the Saint-Saens Concerto Nov. 2, which is brilliant and intimate.”

Premier American cellist Zuill Bailey will perform in March, and Canadian violinist Karen Gomyo will be featured in January in a program led by guest conductor Carl St. Clair.

“He’s a very capable conductor and one of the best in the region,” Ferrandis said. “I’m really counting on him.”

It’s fitting that the symphony’s principal clarinetist, Roy Zajac, will perform Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto in February. Zajac has organized hours of volunteer performances over the years by symphony musicians for donor events for the hall.

While Ferrandis is keenly aware of the risks that lie ahead for his regional orchestra, the conductor is relishing the rare opportunity to rise to the reputation of the world-class music hall.

“Who are the regional ensembles who get that chance?” he asked. “There is no art without taking

#### **SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY**

**What:** The Kronos Quartet joins conductor Bruno Ferrandis

**Where:** The Green Music Center at Sonoma State University. 1801 E Cotati Ave, Rohnert Park

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday (10/6) and Monday (10/8), and 3 p.m. Sunday (10/7)

**Admission:** \$29-\$75.

**Info:** 546-8742, [santarosasympphony.com](http://santarosasympphony.com)

risks.”

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