

by Michael Stugrin

Screening Rooms

From the silent era to the video-game age, films with live music performed by an orchestra are bringing new dimensions to the concert experience.

This fall at Davies Symphony Hall, scenes from Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* will be matched with Bernard Herrmann's classic score performed by the San Francisco Symphony (shown here in a mockup) under guest conductor Joshua Gersen. Also on the November 2 film-with-orchestra program: Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, *Dial M for Murder*, and *To Catch a Thief*.



On three balmy spring evenings in Costa Mesa, in southern California, concertgoers nearly filled Segerstrom Hall, the 2,000-seat home of the Pacific Symphony and the Orange County Philharmonic Association. The crowd was mostly dressed *haute couture* and in business suits, but with a noticeable representation of 20s-30s-40s “surfer gals and dudes” in jeans and sneakers. A typical Southern California concert audience.

Billed as “a symphonic night at the movies,” the concert featured a screening of a restored version of the 1952 film *Singin’ in the Rain* with the Pacific Symphony performing the full score, conducted by Richard Kaufman, the orchestra’s longtime principal pops conductor and a Hollywood music veteran. The score by Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown, screenplay by Betty Comden and Adolf Green, direction by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, and stellar performances by Kelly, Donald O’Connor, Debbie Reynolds, and Jean Hagan—all made for an eye- and ear-popping evening. The gilding on the concert lily was commentary before and after the performance by Patricia Ward Kelly, Gene Kelly’s widow and a biographer and film historian. The images on the huge screen were crisp, nearly lifelike; and the richly orchestrated score sounded familiar and yet vibrant and fresh. The audience for *Singin’ in the Rain* did, in fact, do some singing, or at least humming.

Just a week later, at the 500-seat Samueli Theater next door to Segerstrom Hall, an enthusiastic crowd gathered for a rare screening of Friedrich Murnau’s 1926 silent-film classic *Faust*, featuring the live performance of an original score by the Swiss-born composer-saxophonist Daniel Schnyder and his jazz trio.

A third film-with-orchestra production by the Pacific Symphony, vastly different from either of these, occurred this summer

when the orchestra presented *Video Games Live* at the 16,000-seat Verizon Wireless Amphitheater in Irvine. It was a multimedia celebration of video games bursting with state-of-the-art lighting, special effects, video, interactive segments, and a soaring-throbbing score drawn from such games as “Super Mario Bros.,” “Final Fantasy,” “Halo,” and “Assassin’s Creed.” Emmanuel Fratianni, a Hollywood-based music director and former professor in the Jazz Department of the Montreux Conservatory of Music, led the Pacific Symphony in the concert, which was created and hosted by video-game composer and musician Tommy Tallarico.

But as soon as that enormous assemblage of lights, projectors, and computers was cleared away, start-up was set to begin for a performance by the Pacific Symphony of *Pixar in Concert*, featuring music and sights from Disney/Pixar’s digital classics such as *Finding Nemo*, *Cars*, and *Ratatouille*. On the podium was Sarah Hicks, staff conductor at the Curtis Institute of Music and principal pops conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra.

This season film music *sans* visuals is also on tap at the Pacific Symphony. In February, no less than John Williams will arrive at Segerstrom Hall to conduct selections from his vast repertoire, including *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, the Indiana Jones films, *Jurassic Park*, *Schindler’s List*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Lincoln*. Then in May, the orchestra and Music Director Carl St.Clair will present *From Score to Screen* as part of the orchestra’s 2014 American Composers Festival. The concert will feature music by Hans Zimmer (*The Lion King*, *The Thin Red Line*, *The Last Samurai*), Elliot Goldenthal (*Batman Forever*, *Frida*), and Bernard Herrmann (*The Devil and Daniel Webster*, *Psycho*, *North by Northwest*, *Taxi Driver*).

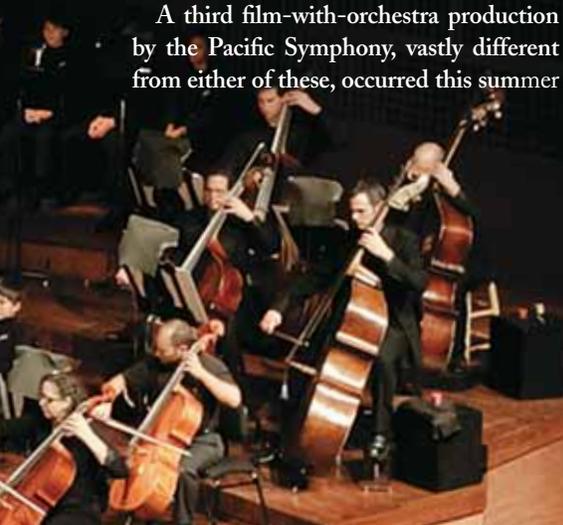
It might be tempting to attribute Pacific Symphony’s penchant for projects like these to its proximity to the film industry. And certainly the Los Angeles Philharmonic has been a pioneer on this front, forging long-established relationships with Hollywood studios. For decades, many of the Philharmonic’s most seasoned musicians have played movie scores for Hollywood’s legendary filmmakers. The Philharmonic’s revered annual movie nights at the Hollywood Bowl have largely defined the genre.

But the film-with-orchestra trend is a far stronger and broader national and international phenomenon. From Alaska (Anchorage Symphony, *Modern Times*) to Denver (Colorado Symphony’s “Symphony at the Movies” series, including *Casablanca*) to Maine (Portland Symphony, *The Mark of Zorro*); from large orchestras (New York Philharmonic’s “Film Week at the Philharmonic,” including *2001: A Space Odyssey*) to small (Pennsylvania’s Butler County Symphony Orchestra, *City Lights*), U.S. orchestras, and dozens of others worldwide, are programming film-with-orchestra productions. And more often than not, audiences are filling their halls and asking for more.

The appeal of good films with good orchestral music is nothing new. Iconic movies—most films by Chaplin and Hitchcock, and so many films from Disney and the great Hollywood studios—are triumphs of the integration of film and music. As the movies themselves live on thanks to cable television, DVDs, video streaming, and film festivals, so does film music. For decades, a staple of pops programming has been concert versions of popular film scores (e.g., virtually all of John Williams’s work, Disney’s *Fantasia*) and suites (Prokofiev’s *Lieutenant Kije* Suite, Bernstein’s Symphonic Suite from *On the Waterfront* and Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*), sometimes enhanced with commentary from the conductor and still shots or short clips of famous scenes projected on a screen above the orchestra.

More frequently in recent years, music directors are looking to film music for some of their classical series, particularly outstanding works of complexity and beauty by such giants as Herrmann, Erich Korngold, Miklós Rózsa, and Aaron Copland. In fact, there is a respected school of thought that film scores constitute a separate, hybrid classical/musical category. Composing for this genre requires an expansive knowledge of music and film, a programmatic sensibility to reflect and advance a movie’s plot and theme, and a sharp ear for a modern musical vernacular that can take command of the impatient, suspended disbelief of modern audiences.

For lovers of film and film music, the most exciting current development in decades is film with orchestra: the screening of digitally enhanced classic movies with



Courtesy San Francisco Symphony



West Side Story at Avery Fisher Hall in September 2011, with David Newman leading the New York Philharmonic in the film-with-orchestra version

Photo by Stephanie Berger. Film credit: MGM/HD

live orchestral performance of scores that have been reconstructed and re-orchestrated for standard-size (or even chamber) ensembles.

Thanks for the Memories

One could argue that the film-with-orchestra movement began on November 5, 1987 at the sold-out Dorothy Chandler Pavilion of the Music Center of Los Angeles County. Under the baton of Music Director André Previn, the Los Angeles Philharmonic performed a newly reconstructed version of Sergei Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* score with the 1938 film by Russian director Sergei Eisenstein. Shown for the first time in the United States was a fresh print of the director's original nitrate negative. The revitalized score was performed by 104 players of the Philharmonic, augmented by 130 singers from the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and featuring mezzo-soprano Christine Cairns. The driving force behind the project was John Goberman, producer of the acclaimed *Live from Lincoln Center* series and a onetime cellist in the American Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski.

From the time of its release, *Alexander Nevsky* was considered a masterpiece. But the version shown in theaters was grainy and blurred and, more disturbing, the music was distinctly tinny and badly performed by a much-too-small orchestra. As Previn described it, "The best film score ever written is trapped inside the worst soundtrack ever recorded." The *Alexander Nevsky* score was obviously not "background music." In fact, Eisenstein and Prokofiev had collaborated closely,

much as Steven Spielberg and John Williams would do decades later. The composer would often craft music to fit an already filmed and edited sequence; sometimes the director would edit scenes to fit music his collaborator had already composed.

Prokofiev soon created a cantata version of the score that met with wide acclaim. For Goberman and his arranger, William D. Brohn, the challenge was to produce a score based on the cantata, but arranged for a larger orchestra and chorus that would fully match the film's sweep and majesty. Both the Los Angeles crowd and critics were ecstatic with the results. The 1987 *Alexander Nevsky* production went on a heralded international tour, and has been produced many times since.

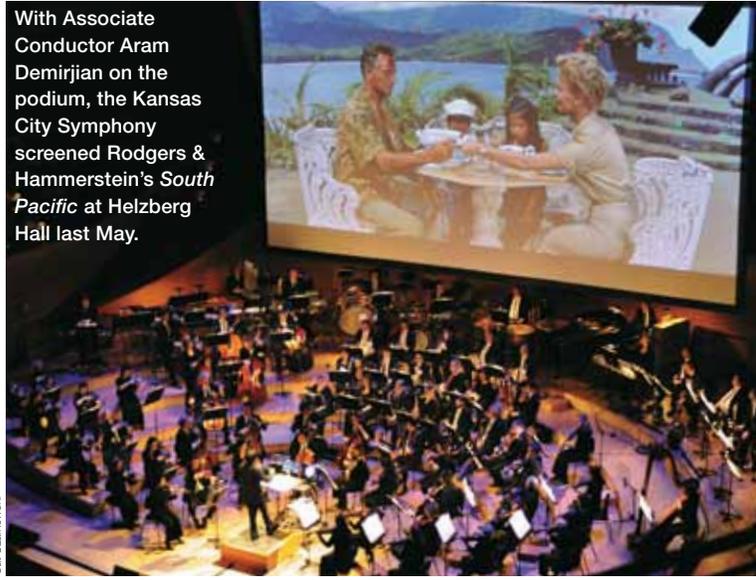
"Watching that first *Alexander Nevsky* film-with-orchestra production was my 'light bulb' moment," says Steve Linder, a senior vice president at IMG Artists who handles engagements for several pops conductors and such film-with-orchestra productions as *Rodgers and Hammerstein at the Movies* and *West Side Story*. "I remember thinking this was the most interesting thing I'd ever seen." At the time, Linder was in the Los Angeles Philharmonic's marketing department, but would later move to the Hollywood Bowl, where he became director of pre-

sentations and helped develop the Bowl's "Film Nights" and worked on projects to restore and present lost or neglected Hollywood film scores.

"Film music is the 'classical' music of our day," says Linder. "Excerpts and suites from scores have always been popular. The big change has been that audiences are coming to embrace full evenings of film with music." Linder recalls that as a child the first movie he saw at Radio City Music Hall in New York City was *Mary Poppins*. "I had to get dressed up. I was sitting there with 6,000 other people sharing this incredible communal experience. There's a huge difference between that experience and watching a movie on DVD in your living room."

One of the highlights of his career, Linder says, was working for almost two years with conductor/composer/music preservationist David Newman and the Leonard Bernstein Office to develop and produce a film-with-orchestra version of *West Side Story* for that movie's 50th anniversary in 2011. "The original score materials and the original mixing tracks are lost," he says, "so all we had available to reconstruct the complete movie score was the music from the Broadway version and various brief piano and orchestral arrangements which Bernstein had blessed." It took teams of audio experts to painstakingly extract the original music, leaving the singing voices, dialogue, and audio effects as intact and authentic as possible. "Then came the challenge of re-orchestrating the score," says Linder. "The original movie recording utilized a huge Hollywood studio orchestra—probably

With Associate Conductor Aram Demirjian on the podium, the Kansas City Symphony screened Rodgers & Hammerstein's *South Pacific* at Helzberg Hall last May.



Curt Szalkowski

140 musicians, including eight pianos and tons of percussion, tons of everything. We needed realistic instrumentation sized for today's standard symphony orchestra."

The rest, as they say, is history. In September 2011, *West Side Story*, golden-anniversary edition, sold out when it was shown and performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and headed to Australia and Japan.

What's Up, Doc?

Orchestras of all sizes are renting remastered, often digitized versions of well-known films and their scores, many of which have been reconstructed and/or rescored. The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra presented *The Wizard of Oz* during its 2008-09 season to mark the film's 70th anniversary. It subsequently presented *Bugs Bunny on Broadway* and *Bugs Bunny at the*

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Symphony as well as *Pirates of the Caribbean*; upcoming are *Fantasia* and *Singin' in the Rain* under the direction of Jeff Tyzik, the RPO's longtime principal pops conductor.

"*Bugs Bunny at the Symphony* is at the top of RPO's all-time strongest single-ticket sales for a pops concert," says RPO President and CEO Charles Owens. "And our other film-with-orchestra productions have been strong sellers as well. These productions have a strong cross-generational appeal. The classic titles are brands that have permeated our consciousness. RPO subscribers are 'of a certain age,' and our single-ticket buyers tend to be much younger. The young adults come out of curiosity and to have a great time, while the older folks come to see films and listen to music they have loved for years. Film-with-orchestra is our primary audience development tool."

It was not difficult for Rochester audiences to embrace film with orchestra, Owens points out. "For much of the 20th century, Rochester was known as the 'Image

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City.' We had the Eastman Kodak Company, the Eastman School of Music, and the Eastman Theatre. When our theater opened in 1922 and over many years following, it showcased silent films with live organ music on weekdays and full orchestra on weekends. Film with orchestral music is in our DNA."

Whether or not a community and its orchestra have strong ties to the film or entertainment industries, audience development is a priority for orchestra leadership everywhere. "How can we build an audience for the future if they never come to our 'house'?" asks Frank Byrne, executive director of the Kansas City Symphony. "It would be a mistake to think of film with orchestra as either a cash cow or an easy solution to our long-term challenge." However, Byrne says his orchestra's new Helzberg Hall, acclaimed for its excellent acoustics and sight lines, is an ideal venue for film with orchestra. "We have 1,600 seats, but with a screen in place we can sell only 1,400. Our pops series is at least 85 percent subscribed, but the single tickets we sell are often to people who have never been in our house before."

Last season the Kansas City Symphony partnered with Butch Rigby, owner of Screenland Theatres, a popular local chain of Kansas City neighborhood movie theaters. "Butch and I had been talking about how to take advantage of Helzberg Hall's acoustics and sound system," Byrne recalls. The result was *Screenland at the Symphony*, a series of film-with-orchestra productions hosted from the stage by Rigby himself. The Kansas City audience was enthusiastic about *Hitchcock!* and *Rodgers and Hammerstein at the Movies*. "There was strong word-of-mouth and social media commentary that we don't see that often," says Byrne.

As the orchestra looks to this season's *Screenland at the Symphony* productions, Byrne says he's convinced that film-with-orchestra provides his audience with "a new point of connection and bridge to the classical repertoire. Film music is excellent music in and of itself. And our audience's strong response to these film events thus far proves that orchestras can still connect."

The ability of film-with-orchestra to attract new and bigger audiences has been the driver of the San Francisco Symphony's recent investment in film projects. After last summer's sold-out *Video Games Live*, *The Matrix*, *Disney in Concert*, and *Battle-*

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ship Potemkin, tickets are moving rapidly for the symphony's 2013-14 subscription film-with-orchestra series featuring the films and music of Hitchcock and Herrmann, including the world premiere of the film-with-orchestra version of *Vertigo*; four "Saturday Concerts with Film"; and a holiday performance of *White Christmas*.

"After several years of successful film-with-orchestra productions, in our 2011-12 centennial season we commissioned some serious research focused on current concert attendees and people who were not attending our concerts but who were 'culturally aware' in that they attended opera or ballet or visited local museums," explains John Mangum, the San Francisco Symphony's director of artistic planning. "People we surveyed and talked to are interested in interdisciplinary, multi-sensory experiences.

We also found that people of all ages like the idea of new experiences that keep the orchestra at the center of attention. This finding led us to look at a variety of programming, including film. Our new film series reflects this."

Sounds of Silents

It is difficult to quantify or categorize—or even give a definitive name to—the film-with-orchestra trend. Is it "symphonic cinema?" "orchestral film?" "orchestra with film?" "symphonic night at the movies"? Also still to be determined is the pace at which more contemporary films are transformed into film-with-orchestra "products." Probably the largest provider of such products today is IMG Artists' Film with Orchestra Division, which lists sixteen titles, from *Casablanca* to *A Night at the Oscars* to *West Side Story*. The Disney Concert Library offers four titles, including *Disney Live in Concert* and *Fantasia*. Offerings from Columbia Artists Management Inc. include three titles from the *Lord of the Rings* cycle. Columbia Artists Music (which is independent from Columbia

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Artists Management) offers *The Matrix Live*. And Warner Brothers has collaborated with the British Film Institute on a film-with-orchestra version of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Silent films presented with either their original scores or newly composed ones are another important, and popular, form of film-with-orchestra presentation. Preservationists have worked over decades to discover and restore numerous silent films and their scores. The earliest silent films were accompanied by a piano or organ soloist who borrowed popular or classical tunes to emphasize the action on the screen; at some point, they started to compose bridge music to bring together the borrowed melodies. Eventually, silent movies included original music or hybrid arrangements of original and published music, along with cue sheets to guide the accompanist or orchestra conductor in synchronizing the music with the film.

Perhaps the ultimate pioneering artist in film direction, acting, and music composition is Charlie Chaplin. And in 2014, the worlds of film and orchestral music are collaborating to mark both the 125th anniversary of Chaplin's birth and the 100th anniversary of his first appearance as the now-iconic Tramp character.

Joining this global celebration of Chaplin's films and film music is Matthew Kraemer, music director of Pennsylvania's Butler County Symphony Orchestra and Erie Chamber Orchestra and associate conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Kraemer has scheduled a November 2 presentation of *City Lights* with his Butler County orchestra, its first film-with-orchestra production. Selling the idea to his board of directors, Kraemer says, was no problem. "I simply asked the question, 'What if we can provide our audience an affordable, rich musical experience in a highly unique and exciting format?' *City Lights* is one of the greatest movies ever made. It's Chaplin at his best as an actor,



"City Lights is one of the greatest movies ever made," says Butler County Symphony Music Director Matthew Kraemer. The score is challenging, however; Chaplin's films come with no audio cueing or bar counters or clocks.

Chaplin will be widely celebrated. Roy Export S.A.S., the company that owns the Chaplin films made from 1918 onwards, is making available rental copies of 35mm and digital versions of six feature films, including *City Lights*, *The Gold Rush*, and *Modern Times*, along with a half dozen short films. The scores are based on the restoration and reconstruction work of composer-arranger Timothy Brock, who was hired by the Chaplin family to restore and perform Chaplin's scores. Most of the scores call for full orchestra, although most of the films also have chamber-orchestra versions for venues of 700 or fewer seats.

From Milan to Bremen to Kyoto, from Anchorage to Winnipeg to Butler and Lexington, at least 60 film-with-orchestra performances of Chaplin films are set for 2013-14. The Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra is leveraging its proximity to Hollywood and its aptitude for innovative programming in a June production of Chaplin's *Modern Times* and *Kid Auto Races at Venice*, with Timothy Brock conducting Chaplin's score.

Over the Rainbow

As orchestras grapple with the challenges of audience development and financial sustainability, the film-with-orchestra genre seems to be a win-win-win proposition: orchestra management, orchestra

director, and composer."

Kraemer points out that the *City Lights* score is challenging for both orchestra and conductor. In contrast to sound films that have been adapted to the film-with-orchestra format, Chaplin's productions come with no audio cueing or bar counters or clocks. "The conductor's printed score has visual cues, but other than that you're on your own," says Kraemer. "There's no stopping. It's immediately and painfully evident to the audience if the orchestra is behind or ahead of what's happening on the screen."

As orchestras have announced their 2013-14 seasons, it's clear that

musicians, and audiences are embracing it. Asked to reflect on the Pacific Symphony's recent near-marathon series of film-with-orchestra projects, President John Forsythe says, "We are pleased with our audience's positive response to film. Some of our symphonic cinema programs draw as many patrons as our successful pops programs. They also tend to be less expensive than pops programs featuring high-end soloists."

Forsythe notes that the odds for a successful film-with-orchestra investment are stronger if the conductor and orchestra are enthusiastic. The Pacific Symphony's principal pops conductor, Richard Kaufman, spent decades in the Hollywood film industry leading major projects at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios and MGM television. "Our conductor and so many of our musicians," says Forsythe, "have living, working relationships with the leading film composers, starting with the so-called 'golden age' and to the present day. We feel that we 'curate' performances of the great movie scores, in the sense that our musicians have deep knowledge, respect, and passion for these works. They're in the Pacific Symphony's DNA. In these scores is an intrinsic demand for clarity and conveying the drama of the sound. The musicians understand the vocabulary and style of the composers, because in many cases they studied under and performed for those composers. To play the 101-minute score from *Wizard of Oz* is uplifting. But after playing a difficult score—for no less than Judy Garland—musicians are fatigued at the end of the evening."

There are a few cautionary tales about film-with-orchestra. Forsythe admits that while many people love film-with-orchestra, "there will always be those who just prefer to see a live performance by a living performer." In San Francisco, John Mangum says his musicians enjoy film projects, "as long as we do not shift the orchestra's focus from classical music. However, they realize that the music from these great movies reaches the threshold of quality for both audiences and musicians." **S**

MICHAEL STUGRIN writes about the arts and resides in Long Beach, California. He is co-author of *Music Looks Forward: The Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, 1934-2009* (2010) and author of the forthcoming *Eat Your Memories: Views from Los Altos*.