

# A Mother's Day Rhapsody to Remember

By Jon Lewis

Blue skies and the bucolic UC Davis campus provided the backdrop as nearly 1,000 patrons gathered on Mother's Day for the Auburn Symphony's 2015-16 season finale at the majestic Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts.

Leonard Bernstein's effervescent "Overture to Candide" served as a brisk and palate-pleasing appetizer to open the Sunday afternoon program. Maestro Peter Jaffe then had mothers in the audience stand for a round of applause before noting that a second maternal presence, Mother Earth, was to be feted on this day. Jaffe was referring to the upcoming performance of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1 in D major and the Austrian composer's love of nature.

Before the audience was asked to settle in for Mahler's dramatic ride, the time had come to enjoy the highlight of the concert: guest pianist Richard Glazier of Sacramento, a nationally recognized expert on the music of George and Ira Gershwin and an aficionado of the American Songbook.

Glazier briefed the audience on the afternoon's featured selection, "Rhapsody in Blue." He said George Gershwin had not been asked to write for an orchestra before and, despite approaching his assignment with reluctance, churned out the iconic piece in an astonishing span of just three weeks.

Glazier's love affair with Gershwin's music started as a child when he had the opportunity to meet with Ira Gershwin and perform a piece on the late George Gershwin's personal piano. After that encounter, he dedicated himself to mastering Gershwin's repertoire.

"I've been living with this piece since I was 9," said the 53-year-old Glazier. He then invited the audience to celebrate "the voice of America; the voice of our people; the voice of a genius."

"Rhapsody in Blue" proved to be an excellent vehicle to showcase the musical breadth of the expanded symphony. From principal clarinetist Patty Wassum's flawless glissando introduction to the spine-tingling final chords from the Steinway & Sons concert grand piano, the composition was a musical bouquet for every audience member, mothers included.

The orchestra members approached Gershwin's ode to American themes with just the right amount of verve and expression while expertly complementing Glazier's precise phrasing. The approximately 17-minute journey was at times lush and sweeping; at others it sparkled with gaiety and optimism. French horns would softly alert the violins to an upcoming mood swing before the entire orchestra thundered a response.

Throughout it all, Glazier played with gusto. This is clearly a piece he loves and one he loves to perform. With palpable gratitude, the audience eagerly summoned him back to the stage for solo instrumental encores of "Someone to Watch Over Me" and "Embraceable You."

Mahler's "Titan" symphony was both a sobering and scintillating contrast to the much-loved Gershwin selections. A substantial piece that clocks in at 50 minutes, Mahler's Symphony No. 1 was some 10 years in the making. It debuted in 1889 to less than favorable reviews and underwent a number of revisions. As Jane Vial Jaffe noted in her detailed program notes, Mahler himself was averse to offering any guides to his listeners. Those objections may have contributed to the symphony's initially cool reception.

Under the capable and expressive baton of Maestro Jaffe, however, the "Titan" assumed its rightful glory with swirling themes and deft oboe performances that culminated in the final movement's exhilarating and thunderous cymbal-accented climax—a worthy closing statement on the symphony's successful season.

*Jon Lewis is a Redding-based writer who has reported on the arts in Northern California for more than 35 years.*