

Happy Fourth of July! Pacific Symphony Volunteer Challenge #65

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Hello, Pacific Symphony Volunteers!

I hope that you are gearing up for a fun, holiday weekend, just like me! One of the fun things I will be doing is attending Pacific Symphony's first live concert in over 16 months at **Five Points Amphitheater (through Live Nation) on Sunday, July 4th at 8:00pm**. I invite you to join us for an evening of patriotic songs, the chart-topping hits of Elton John, a salute to our Armed Forces and a beautiful fireworks display! Tickets are still available here: <https://www.pacificsymphony.org/tickets/concert/eltonjohntribute> **Please look for me if you come!**



This past week, our Favorite Volunteer Challenge Contributor, Bob Apfelzweig, shared the following musical information with me about two American composers in honor of July 4th. Bob is such a musical expert, I just knew you would all be delighted to read and listen, too! These are not your typical patriotic songs, but genuinely refreshing American works of art! Thank you, Bob!

Bob wrote, "When one thinks of popular American composers of the 20th century, usually just a handful of names come to mind -- Copland, Gershwin, and perhaps Leonard Bernstein and Ferde Grofe. No one thinks of, or remembers, Don Gillis (1912-1978), but he wrote 10 symphonies, 2 piano concertos, and a total of over 160 works. He was a master orchestrator and had a remarkably musical sense of humor -- perfectly exemplified in his Symphony No. 5 1/2, "A Symphony for Fun" (he wrote it in the later 1940s between his 5th and 6th symphonies, so the name was a natural!). It's only about 15 minutes long, but a real hoot to hear -- echoes of Broadway, Jazz, Tin Pan Alley and Gershwin abound. Gillis began writing symphonies in his 30's and all of them have programmatic titles (he lived much of his professional life in Texas, and many of his compositions are about that state and several of its cities). To support his

contention that this is, indeed, "A Symphony for Fun", the four movements are named: (1) Perpetual emotion, (2) Spiritual (3) Schizophrenia and (4) Conclusion! (That's HIS exclamation point, not mine.)

An odd thing about his music is that most of it has been recorded by the Sinfonia Varsovia of Warsaw, Poland, and in this YouTube video Harvey Bordowitz leads the Herzliya Chamber Orchestra of Israel. Again, good music travels well!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpJpRo6YL34>

The other great American composer was a real original -- in several ways. Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869), arguable America's first musical superstar, was born in New Orleans. His dad was a German-Jewish immigrant merchant and his mom was Cajun-Catholic. At an early age, he became a piano prodigy and his parents sent him to Europe to learn music from the masters there. In Paris, he performed Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 with an approving Chopin himself in the audience, and he took that city by storm with his own compositions based on Creole tunes, African-American rhythms and Southern folk tunes -- music he had grown up with. Upon his return to America he began a life as a touring and composing vagabond, traveling throughout the USA (especially during the Civil War; a staunch Unionist, he performed benefit concerts on piano for American soldiers as well as civilian audiences), the Caribbean, and eventually ending up (literally) in South America, where he died in Brazil at the age of 40 from an acute abdominal infection, probably aggravated by an overdose of quinine. His music, mostly for solo piano, was published haphazardly and a lot of it is probably still lost. He was adept at improvising and, as a result, his handful of orchestral works have only recently been studied and released in authentic editions. He put on "monster concerts" with multiple pianos and often used whatever musicians were available locally, sometimes in the hundreds, and if you watch and listen to the YouTube video of the second (and last) movement, "Fiesta criolla", of his Symphony No. 1. subtitled "A Night in the Tropics" (1869), I would bet that no other orchestral composer in the world in the middle of the 19th century would include percussion parts for conga drums! His music presages ragtime and jazz by decades. In this video, the music is conducted, again ironically, by the Basel Festival Orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJs3gO6BX9A>

For those wanting both movements of the Symphony No. 1, they are performed on YouTube by Richard Rosenberg (who has personally edited and recorded all of Gottschalk's orchestral music) and the Patent Orchestra of Munich (again with foreign orchestras performing authentic American music!):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5H3jT_zmuPI (First Movement)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxqcaHMTyyE> (Second movement)

Personally, I think that the Basel Orchestra sounds better; the strings of the Munich orchestra are a little wiry." In closing, Bob suggested that someday, perhaps, our own Pacific Symphony might be encouraged to perform some of these pieces!

It brings me so much happiness to stay connected with you each week! Until I see you again (which for some of you will be THIS SUNDAY!), please stay well. Stay safe. Know how much we miss you.

Warm regards,

Abby

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