

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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# THE Spectrum





# Redwood Symphony

## CELEBRATES 31 YEARS OF BEING OUR MUSICAL “COMMUNITY GEM”

—By JULIE MCCOY, contributing writer

**F**or the past three decades, Redwood Symphony has delighted audiences with its performances of unique orchestra music created by a variety of composers.

The symphony will kick off its 31st season on Saturday, Sept. 26, with a concert at Cañada College’s Main Theatre featuring the work of Michael Daugherty, one of the most popular living American composers. Daugherty, a professor at the University of Michigan, will be flying to the Bay Area to personally attend the West Coast premiere of his cello concerto “Tales of Hemingway.”

“It will be a big night,” said Redwood Symphony conductor and founder Eric Kujawsky. “[Daugherty is] our guest for the weekend, so that makes it a big deal for us. It’s quite an honor to have him.”

The first show of the season is expected to draw hundreds of people. The season will continue with four more concerts on Nov. 21, Feb. 20, April 16 and May 28.

In addition to its season ticket offerings, on Sunday, Oct. 25, at 3 p.m., Redwood Symphony will hold its annual Family Halloween Concert. The concert has sold out the last couple of years and is very, very popular. Kujawsky dresses in costume and adults and kids alike come in costume as well. There will be an orchestra tour and a Sousa march conducted by 10 lucky children. Raffle tickets also will be available for purchase at the concert.

Micki Carter, who handles marketing for Redwood Symphony, said, “This is a gem. It is a community gem.”

Redwood Symphony is thriving and growing at a time when many other symphonies aren’t, Carter pointed out. “We’ve got something people really do want,” she said. “We’re growing. We’re definitely on the upside. We want to ride that as long as we can.”

The symphony was founded by Kujawsky in 1985 as an offshoot of the Stanford Summer Orchestra, which Kujawsky started when he was a doctoral student at Stanford University. The group initially performed at Foothill College but moved to Cañada College in August 1987.

The orchestra typically has between 75 and 95 members but on several occasions has had more than 100 members, according to Kujawsky.

“Everyone with whom I work at Redwood Symphony is doing it because they love the music,” Kujawsky



pointed out. “They love the particular kind of vibe we have. They love working with each other, and I hear some of them even like me. With a majority of music, most of us are doing it or even hearing it for the first time and that’s an amazing experience, especially if you’ve been in as many orchestras as I have.”

Members are diverse in terms of their background and the professions in which they work. Some are from the technology sector while others are doctors, teachers and lawyers. They play a variety of instruments, including the clarinet, oboe, English horn, French horn, bassoon, bass drums and even electronic instruments such as synthesizers.

Peter Stahl, who has an information technology career working as a freelance user interface designer, is one of Redwood Symphony’s original members. He joined the orchestra in 1985 and has been involved ever since. He plays primarily the oboe and English horn.

For Stahl, Redwood Symphony is family. He met his wife, Janet Sloan, who is a cellist, through the orchestra, which performed at their 1993 wedding atop the Santa Cruz Mountains.

“Many of my closest friends over the past 30 years are my fellow musicians,” Stahl said. “I love rehearsing

and performing great music with my friends. It’s truly a transcendent experience. My oboe and English horn playing has steadily improved over the years. That’s apparent from listening to our recordings. I’ve improved through experience, through interactions with my fellow musicians and lessons I’ve taken with world-class professionals to prepare some of the more challenging solos. In particular, I have gotten to work with former San Francisco Symphony members Julie Ann Giacobassi and William Bennett to prepare music for Redwood Symphony concerts. To me, that’s like batting practice with Willie Mays.”

Stahl has been exposed to a variety of orchestra work that he otherwise wouldn’t have ever known about or experienced, thanks to his involvement with the Redwood Symphony. “I have become intimately familiar with a broad swath of the symphonic repertoire, which is a wonderful thing,” he said. “Redwood Symphony has played dozens of masterpieces from the past three centuries. I get to sit in the middle of it, hearing how these works of genius are constructed and contributing my own sound. This has deepened my appreciation for the art form.”

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# REDWOOD SYMPHONY

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**D**oug McCracken, an IT manger for two research departments at the University of California, San Francisco, has been a member of the Redwood Symphony for 20 years. He currently plays the bassoon.

"The best thing about the Redwood Symphony orchestra is that we don't hesitate to perform the most difficult music there is, or to perform music that may be unusual or somewhat difficult for the audience to understand," McCracken said. "The group has done a lot to help me grow as a musician, including the chance to perform the most demanding — and fun — music in the repertoire."

McCracken had the opportunity to perform a solo work for bassoon and orchestra that he wrote himself last March. "This was a great chance to perform a solo, get a better idea of what it takes to make sure an orchestra understands how to perform something I've written and of course have the somewhat unusual chance to be a bassoonist in the spotlight."

Involvement with the symphony is on a strictly volunteer basis. "When it's not a job, I think people get more deep emotional satisfaction from it," Kujawsky said.

Rehearsals are held at Cañada College on Wednesday nights from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. The group typically does five large concerts per season.

Concertgoers not only get to see amazing performances, but are greeted by charming lobby staff and can take advantage of ample free parking and low prices.

"I hope they'll want to hear us again," Kujawsky said. "Pick any performance, and the spectrum of reactions to it will be very wide. Once in a while, someone will tell me that a particular performance we did was a peak experience for them, or that we introduced a now-favorite work to them, or we showed them how fun and unstuffy classical music can be. I treasure those comments most of all."

Redwood Symphony currently has seven CDs that are on its own label, Redwood Recordings, and are available on iTunes and Amazon.com for \$10 apiece, according to Kujawsky. The CDs can also be purchased at every single concert.

"I am really proud of these," Kujawsky said. "It reproduces the immaculate results of a professional group. They are considered audiophile recordings."

You will never see Kujawsky wearing a suit or tie at any Redwood Symphony performance. He isn't a fan of either. Rather, he wears embroidered black dress

shirts. Symphony members also wear primarily black, with a little bit of color. "Everyone is in black but is supporting a color to go with it," Kujawsky said. "It looks like a sophisticated adult party."

As the conductor of Redwood Symphony, Kujawsky gets to meet other conductors, especially within California.

"Many of them work for organizations with much more money than we have, but I hear many expressions of envy over the freedom I have to program what I want," he said. "I've done the most of the music I've ever wanted to do, which is a very fortunate thing indeed. Some of these works, like Messiaen's 'Turangalila Symphony,' Ives' Fourth Symphony or Mahler's Eighth — which we're doing for the second time next July 30 — are like magical, edible unicorns of the orchestral world. You hear about them, but when do you actually encounter them, even with professional groups? Yes, the San Francisco Symphony does them, but groups like Redwood Symphony never do them — until now."

Kujawsky started playing the violin at age 9. He knew he wanted to be a conductor while growing up, and he became one. "I had this plan that I followed through on," he said.

Kujawsky's teachers included Samuel Krachmalnick, Paul Vermel and Andor Toth. He has performed with the Aspen Music Festival, several Bay Area orchestras and choruses, TheatreWorks in Palo Alto, Ramshead Productions at Stanford and the Cañada College drama department.

Some of Kujawsky's favorite composers are Stravinsky, Bartok, Mahler, Brahms, Sibelius and Mozart. Some of his favorite pieces include Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," "Petruška" and "Les Noches," Bartok's "Concerto for Orchestra" and Brahms' First Symphony.

"I know that I definitely like music that is deeply emotional but also finely wrought in its details and intricate in its form," he said. "It has to have a strong narrative feel, although I never try to imagine a story with a piece of music. The musical narrative is in purely musical terms, although I do think of the themes as characters in the story."

Where does Kujawsky see Redwood Symphony in the future? "In the near future, there are many choices facing us," he said. "We've recently gotten into a higher budget level due to our recent success and we need to figure out where we want to go. There's more commissions of new music, larger concert halls, possibly doing two concerts for some programs at two different sites, hiring an executive director and paying our soloists."

## INTERESTED?

**What:** Redwood Symphony kicks off its 31st season with a performance of Michael Daugherty's cello concerto "Tales of Hemingway." The soloist will be Dahna Rudin.

**Date:** Saturday, Sept. 26.

**Time:** Preconcert lecture begins at 7 p.m. Concert begins at 8 p.m.

**Where:** Cañada College, 4200 Farm Hill Blvd., Redwood City.

**Tickets:** Season tickets cost \$90 for adults, \$75 for seniors and \$50 for students. Children under 18 are free. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.redwoodsymphony.org](http://www.redwoodsymphony.org). Season ticket holders can bring a friend for free to one concert and are entitled to a single \$1 snack item at the concert concession-stand table.

**What:** Redwood Symphony's annual Family Halloween Concert.

**Date:** Sunday, Oct. 25.

**Time:** 3 p.m.

**Cost:** \$25 for adults (\$30 at the door) and \$10 children. Tickets are available online until the evening before the concert (subject to availability) and otherwise at the door. There are no senior, student or free child tickets for this event.

