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Music: Symphony for the devil
'Season of the Scribe' continues with debauching 'Red Priest' Vivaldi

by Greg Cahill

Ready for some stimulating sounds and a good read?

Most folks associate Antonio Vivaldi with his magnum opus *The Four Seasons*, a perennial crowd pleaser and fodder for film scores. But the red-haired 18th-century Italian composer, aka the Red Priest, is the inspiration for a spicy new novel, *Vivaldi's Virgins*, which *Kirkus Reviews* describes as "an intriguing glimpse at the decadence, debauchery and prudery of Baroque-era Venice."

Barbara Quick, the book's author, will be on hand Nov. 1 and 3 for a pre-concert reading when the Marin Symphony mounts the maestro's oft-ridden warhorse.

Her novel is set at the Ospedale della Pietà, the orphanage at which Vivaldi served as a music teacher and concert master. The book is a fictionalized account of the real-life orphan and Vivaldi pupil Anna Maria dal Violin and captures both the glitz and the dark side of Venetian society. The book has been likened to Tracy Chevalier's popular novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

The soloist at the symphony's upcoming performance of *The Four Seasons* will be the talented violinist Elizabeth Pitcairn, who plays the 1720 "Red Mendelssohn" Stradivari, better known as "The Red Violin" and said to have inspired the Academy Award-winning movie of that same name.

Pitcairn—an animated performer as well as an accomplished musician—has dazzled Marin audiences before.

The Marin Symphony, which kicked off its 2009-2010 season a couple of weeks ago with a selection of Gershwin tunes, has three other noteworthy concerts lined up, each coupled with a pre-concert talk that pairs Marin Symphony conductor Alasdair Neale and a noted writer.

On Jan. 31 and Feb. 10, the gifted Russian violin virtuoso Vadim Gluzman, who lives in Israel, joins the Marin Symphony for a performance of Brahms' Violin Concerto in D major. Also on the program is Mozart's Requiem. Earlier this month, Gluzman made his debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Afterward, one Windy City critic raved about the "sweet, penetrating tone" of Gluzman's 1690 Stradivari and his lyrical approach to Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra.

Joining Neale for the pre-concert talk, as a prelude to the Requiem, is poet Roger Housden, author of *For Lovers of God Everywhere: Poems of the Christian Mystics*.

On Feb. 27 and March 1, the symphony offers an Abraham Lincoln-themed program, featuring an as-yet-unannounced celebrity narrator. The music will be Debussy's Prelude a "L'apres-midi d'un faune" (Afternoon of a Faun), Copland's Lincoln Portrait and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64.

Playwright and director Jane Anderson, author of *The Quality of Life*, will join Neale at the pre-concert talk.

The season concludes April 11 and 13 with the world premiere of David Carlson's *The Promise of Time*. The contemporary work was commissioned by the Magnum Opus project, which is funded by Silicon Valley investment banker and amateur violinist Katherine Gould.

Also on the final program is Barber's Essay for Orchestra No. 2, Op. 17, and Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* and "Prelude and Liebestod," from *Tristan and Isolde*.

Carlson and Neale will be joined at the pre-concert talk by librettist and poet Susan Kinsolving.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For Marin Symphony ticket info and schedule details, visit <http://marinsymphony.org> .

SPIN OF THE WEEK

Somewhere Gone (Bloodshot)

Exene Cervenka

The front woman of the seminal L.A. punk band X—and a major influence on a bevy of Gen Y singer/songwriters—delivers her first solo album since 1991, a welcome addition to her all-too-thin catalog. Like her earlier efforts, these stripped-down, soul-baring songs of remorse, but no regret, often resemble spoken-word

pieces set to music. The title track and "Let Go and Be Sweet" echo the flamenco influence of Love's chamber pop. "The Willow Tree" is a bluegrass lament that would fit in well with the Knitters, one of her other side projects. She's backed by a tight-knit acoustic combo that includes singer Cindy Wasserman, sister of Marin jazz and rock bassist Rob Wasserman. Catch Exene in concert Nov. 8 at Slim's in San Francisco.—GC

Hum a few bars for Greg at gcahill51@gmail.com.

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