SANTA CRUZ COUNTY SYMPHONY

The retiring John Larry Granger conducts his final concert with help from the Cabrillo Symphonic Chorus and a few of his friends

By JOHN LARRY GRANGER
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It has been such a privilege and honor to serve as the music director/conductor of the Santa Cruz County Symphony for the past 21 seasons. I cannot thank this incredible community enough for all the support and commitment that I have enjoyed. I am especially grateful for those who served on the board of directors, in the administration, and in the Symphony League. All of them helped to steer the orchestra through many challenging years.

For me, music is about bringing people together. Here in Santa Cruz, my vision was to create a symphony family that could be ever-expanding to include not only the musicians and audience, but also many other organizations that could interact with us as we shared great music together. We began an annual side-by-side concert with the county youth symphony, performed with the Santa Cruz Ballet Theatre, the White Album Ensemble, Zun Zun, Linda Arnold, the Watsonville Taiko Drummers, and the Orchard School Circus Performers among others. We invited guest artists from all over the world to share in the special music that our players could provide. We shared the stage with contemporary composers like Lou Harrison and Paul Moravec. Dozens of young artists on the brink of major careers had some of their earliest concerto experiences with us. We even brought North and South County together by providing full seasons of concerts at both the Civic Auditorium and Mello Center.

Due to the commitment and musicianship of our players, we received the attention of the California Arts Council, which honored us by giving us the highest rating of “Exemplary Status” for a professional orchestra in the state. We have shared some incredible moments together, performing so much of the symphonic literature, including all the Beethoven and Brahms symphonies, the Stravinsky ballets, the later symphonies of Tchaikovsky and Dvorak. I will never forget these amazing moments in my life; I will greatly miss exploring musical scores with the wonderful people that make up the Santa Cruz County Symphony.

As conductor, I have had the unique opportunity to be able not only to see the faces of our musicians as they rehearse and perform but also to watch the expressions of the audiences as they respond. That experience reminds me of what a truly special place Santa Cruz is. I could not have chosen a better family of which to be a part.

While I will be leaving this position, I will always feel a part of this family, watching the exciting year ahead with great interest as the symphony auditions five exceptionally talented conductors, one of which will take the baton and forge a new direction for the orchestra. I hope the community will continue to show its enthusiasm and support for this organization that promises so much for the quality of life in a place we all love so much.