

# DSO manager plays an optimistic tune

By Mary Jane Doerr  
special writer

More striking than his jet black hair and the "I'll try anything" look in his eyes, is Mark Volpe's gentle handshake, like that of a musician.

The new executive director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra is a clarinetist-turned-lawyer who prefers business management to his Eastman School of Music degree and his University of Minnesota law degree.

Volpe, now 33, who enjoys entertaining the artists such as his violinist Nigel Kennedy, is unrelenting in his adoration of director Neeme Jarvi and is outspoken in his ideas about music education. Novel as the surprises he is planning for the now growing DSO audiences.

"We are moving the pops out to Pine Knob this summer," he announced excitedly. "Looking around the country, other orchestras plan their summer programs to increase revenues. We have to do that."

HE DROPPED his next bombshell. Twelve performances of the "Nutcracker" were sold out at the Fox Theatre last winter so he is talking with the Mike Ilitch organization about a week this summer of silent

film nostalgia at the Fox Theatre with the DSO and the "grand" theater organ.

"With popcorn and the whole works," he added.

Realistically, Volpe became rudely aware of the challenges that he faces with the DSO his second day on the job. Gov. John Engler froze \$1 million of the DSO's income.

That is less than the 10 percent projections of the orchestra's \$16 million plus budget, but it comes at a time when the organization is innovatively attempting to reduce the accumulated debt of \$5.1 million through more attractive concert scheduling.

"If there had been an executive order a few years ago, I don't know if the orchestra could have survived it," he said. Now he doesn't seem worried.

Revenues are up 45 percent this year. Ticket sales are up 28 percent. The subscription base for the 1990-91 season is up 17 percent to 19,667. There have been 15 sell-outs this season. The next six weeks of concerts are sold-out for Friday and Saturday evenings.

VOLPE MAKES his objectives clear. "This orchestra remains under-capitalized." He intends to se-



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— Mark Volpe  
executive director  
Detroit Symphony

cure the orchestra's funding.

Next, he said he wants to finish the backstage component and the lobby portions of Orchestra Hall adding a much needed elevator. Third, he will endow the orchestra to insure a more stable future.

"Sure, friends said to me 'why Detroit?' when I came here," he said. "Despite the risk, there is a fantastic

up side to being here. The possibilities are enormous."

Renaissance isn't new to him. He was assistant to the executive director of the Baltimore Symphony early in the '80s during the rejuvenation of that orchestra.

"The best thing that happened to that orchestra was for the city to lose the (football) Colts," he said.

He witnessed the business upswing in Baltimore as a result of the Baltimore Symphony tour of the Soviet Union and Europe. "Some of the GM people told me how the DSO's European tour was one of their most successful marketing tools."

THE 180 recordings Jarvi has made in the last few years have focused international attention on the relationship of this orchestra and their new conductor.

Volpe said Jarvi's arrival is particularly opportune for everyone.

"The relationship between a conductor and an orchestra is like a marriage. This one works. I have never seen an orchestra so enamored of a conductor. There is no way to explain the chemistry. To get him meant a breakdown of the traditional barriers between labor and management. The orchestra wanted him. He is very committed to this orchestra."

He held up a full-color picture of the orchestra taken in Orchestra Hall for the poster for the upcoming Chandos recording. "This picture will be in every major record store in the Pacific, Europe, South America. It translates into business for

Michigan."

Volpe is planning meetings with Detroit's Mayor Coleman Young to strengthen the city's alliance with the orchestra.

"I want to let the mayor know what the orchestra can do for this town. Sure we are an elitist organization. But, that is one side. There are 25,000 students who come to our young people's concerts each year. There are the benefit concerts like the ones for the Red Cross and Desert Storm. The Civic Orchestra offers coaching to young musicians. Our musicians volunteer in the Detroit schools."

Volpe correlated the decline of the country's education system with the decline in music education and berated the arts community for sitting back and allowing it to happen. He wants to strengthen the DSO involvement in music education in the schools.

"When our funds were frozen, I got phone calls from over a major newspaper in the country. The national press wants to write the obituary for this town," he said.

So, while they are about to play dirges, Volpe stays in a "strike up the band" mode.

## Symphony slates cabaret concert

The Livonia Symphony Orchestra, under conductor Francesco Dilibari, presents its 18th annual cabaret concert, "Suddenly It's Spring," at 8 p.m. Saturday, April 13.

The performance will take place in the activities center at Madonna University, 36600 Schoolcraft, Livonia.

Guest soloist is soprano Jolite Fitzpatrick. Master of ceremonies is Fat Bob Taylor. Guest conductors will be Madonna president Sister Mary Francilene and Ernie Jones, a longtime LSO supporter.

Selections will include works by Rimsky-Korsakov, Bizet, Strauss and Loeve.

Tickets are \$12, tables of 8 and 10 are available. Tickets are available at the door.

For tickets, call Ida Krandle, 851-4524, or Madonna, 591-5044.

## Music fest memories can bring tickets

Share your Meadow Brook memories.

We're asking our readers to recount their fondest memories of the Meadow Brook Music Festival, which brightens the cory grounds of Oakland University in Rochester Hills each summer.

Send your reminiscences about experiences in the pavilion or on the hillside to us by Friday, April 19. We'll consider printing them in the Meadow Brook Music Festival

special section we'll publish Thursday, May 30.

Submissions will be subject to editing. Because of limited space, please keep your memories to 300 words or less.

Writers whose special moments are published will be our guest at the concert of their choice this summer.

In submitting your memories, include your name, address and daytime phone number. It's fine to in-

clude a favorite photo. Just make sure it will reproduce. We'll gladly return it.

Mail your memories to: Meadow Brook Memories, c/o Special Sections Editor, Editorial Department, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich. 48150.

— Bob Sklar  
Assistant managing editor

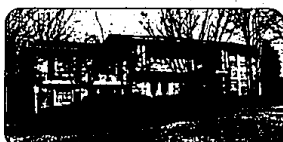
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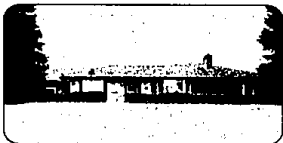
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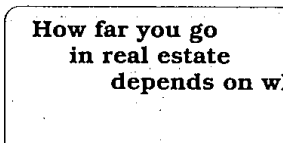
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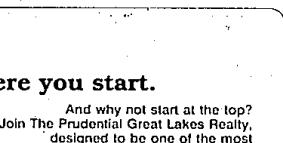
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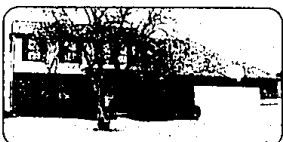
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