

## Preview

### Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom: two *Pixar in Concert* evenings— a conversation with conductor Richard Kaufman

by Mike Telin



“I’ve been very blessed,” conductor Richard Kaufman says of his impressive musical career — most of which he has devoted to conducting and supervising music for film and television productions, as well as performing film and classical music in concert halls and on recordings. On Saturday, August 31, and Sunday, September 1, at Blossom Music Center, Richard Kaufman will lead The Cleveland Orchestra in *Pixar in Concert*. The production includes musical selections from *A Bug’s Life*, *Brave*, *Cars* and *Cars 2*, *Finding Nemo*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Toy Story*, *Toy Story 2* and *3*, *Ratatouille*, *Up*, and *WALL-E* along with video clips of each film. Both concerts will be followed by fireworks, weather permitting.

“I was part of the team that created the show at Disney and this weekend's program is a montage of the 13 Pixar films' music.” Kaufman points out that performing live to animation is not an easy task. “I have to say that I have played violin for many film scores but I think that playing for animation is by far the most challenging. In animation everything moves very quickly: you have to be able to turn on a dime. In the studio all the musicians use click-tracks but this weekend only part of the orchestra will be using click-tracks. And the fact that The Cleveland Orchestra is going to be playing this music on two summer evenings at Blossom is truly wonderful. It’s like all of the Planets have aligned.”

Born in Los Angeles, Kaufman began studying the violin at the age of seven. “There were amazing music programs in LA when I was growing up and my youth orchestra would often play arrangements of film scores right along with the music of Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. I was a member of the Peter Meremblum California Junior Orchestra and what was really fun is that Peter was good friends with both Jack Benny and Jascha Heifetz, so we got to meet them. And just as an aside, Burt Lancaster was my Pony League baseball coach.”

Although Kaufman did not come from a musical family — his father was in the clothing business — he says his parents enjoyed a variety of music. “Because of my upbringing I learned to value all kinds of music. But I was always attracted to the symphonic sound on

the recordings of film scores they bought home”. And growing up in LA did mean that one was surrounded by the movie industry which presented more than a few opportunities. Kaufman recalls that “One day, people from Warner Brothers came to my school looking for kids to audition for the film version of *The Music Man*. Since I played the violin and there were no violins in the movie, I practiced playing the Trombone. Not to actually play it but to make it look like I knew how to play it. So I auditioned and got the part.”

Working in film music calls for a knowledge of all kinds of music and for eighteen years Kaufman served as the Music Coordinator at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, something he says he pinched himself over every day. “I was working as an assistant to Lionel Newman at 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox when Harry Lojewski at MGM invited me to come and work with him. I suddenly found myself working with some of the most creative people in film music. I was involved in the overall musical production for both television and film, including assisting with the hiring of composers as well as doing some of my own composing.”

A unique aspect of his career has been coaching actors in musical roles, including Tom Hanks, who had to play the role of an orchestra concertmaster performing the *Scheherazade* solos in the 1985 film *The Man with One Red Shoe*. A more complicated task was coaching Jack Nicholson to play violin and piano along with making Susan Sarandon a convincing cellist for the 1987 film *The Witches of Eastwick*. “The idea was not to teach them to play, but to teach them to look as though they had been playing the instruments all of their lives.”

Why does Kaufman think the Pixar films so popular with audiences of all ages? “They are films that tell stories that move us as people. They are no different than *Gone with the Wind*.” And although he says he loves all of them he does have a special feeling for *UP*. “It’s a love story from beginning to end — I call it a two handkerchief film.”

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