

**Review****Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom: *Pixar in Concert*  
with Richard Kaufman (August 31)**

by Robert Rollin



The Cleveland Orchestra closed its Blossom Festival summer season on August 31 and September 1 with two performances of *Pixar in Concert*. I attended the Saturday performance, a delightful evening conducted by Richard Kaufman. Kaufman was for eighteen years music coordinator at MGM, supervising both film and television projects. He is now an active pops conductor.

Pixar, the most innovative animation company in recent years, has had a remarkable succession of hits since *Toy Story* (1995), and the evening concentrated on the quality film music that has helped usher in this new era. Several enormous screens projected the film visuals. Pixar's skill has been in humanizing digital animation characters, whether children's toys, monsters, fish, automobiles, insects, or rats, by giving them personalities, endearing expressions, and showing them in life and death struggles to fight the good fight simply to do what is morally right.

Kaufman skillfully coordinated the correlation of music with the films' visual actions. Though a few musicians wore earphones providing click tracks to maintain ensemble, the large majority relied on Kaufman's clear beat to stay together. Normally, the composer and music editor collaborate, integrating dialogue, sound effects, and music to make the final cut — the version that reaches movie theaters. For the Blossom concert, all sound effects and dialogue were removed to concentrate on the music itself.

Randy Newman (b. 1943) might be termed the dean of Pixar composers, since he composed music for all three *Toy Story* movie scores and several other Pixar scores. Known first as a popular song composer, as in his wonderful theme song for the hit television detective show, *Monk*, he also showed exceptional skill in writing the *Toy Story* series music. Kaufman conducted three medleys—one from each of the three movies (1995, 1999, and 2010 respectively).

Newman, perhaps best known for his original skills at black comedy, pop, blues, and jazz styles, added some wonderful Copland-like Americana music in the medley from *Toy Story 2* used to accompany spaceman Buzz Lightyear's relationship with the Cowgirl.

His music depicting *Toy Story 3*'s closing garbage dump scenes was a tour de force of lively background support.

Newman's fine music for the medley from *A Bug's Life* (1999) mixed tongue-in-cheek heroic music, Americana, and big city jazz to tell the story of a bug inventor who gets a troupe of flea circus performers to rid the ant colony of its grasshopper oppressors. The fast paced and well-orchestrated score is one of Newman's finest.



*Monsters, Inc.* (2001) enlisted the talents of Billy Crystal (as Mike) and John Goodman (as Sulley) to depict the pair's attempts to hide the little girl from authorities. Newman's wonderful jazz-derived music supports the action beautifully, as demonstrated in Kaufman's finely coordinated medley performance. The song, *If I Didn't Have You*, won Newman his first Oscar.

Newman's *Cars* score (2006) employed lots of Americana music to evoke the West along Route 66, particularly emphasizing country-based guitar and banjo sounds. The performance was exceptional.

Talented younger composer Michael Giacchino (b. 1967) provided four outstanding medleys. In *The Incredibles* (2004) and *Cars 2* (2011) he created scores filled with music reminiscent of the James Bond movies. The energetic music added excitement to both rapid-fire scenarios. He used accordion and musette to help provide a French flavor to a fast-paced comic score for *Ratatouille* (2007) filled with colorful light waltzes. Here a rat chef and his friends constantly rescue his bumbling human chef counterpart.

The medley from *Up* (2009), a touching story of an old man taking an eight-year-old boy to South America in his balloon-carried house, was a delight, especially in the four-minute "Married Life" sequence, condensing widower Carl's joyous life with his wife Ellie. The movie's mix of excitement and tenderness won Giacchino an Academy Award.

Thomas Newman, Randy's younger cousin (b. 1955), added synthesizers and exotic instruments to the *Finding Nemo* medley (2003) supporting the underwater-animated environment. His fine symphonic scoring bolstered the engaging story in which a father clownfish hunts for his missing son. The colorful medley accompanied wonderfully animated ocean visuals. This was the first movie to win the Oscar for the new category of Animated Feature Film.

In the *WALL•E* medley (2008), an ecology-minded sci-fi story about two robots embarking on a mission to change mankind's future, Thomas Newman's sensitive music contributed emotional depth to the oddball robots. He also wrote fine dramatic orchestral tuttis for the wide-angle outer-space scenes.

Scottish composer Patrick Doyle's (b. 1953) unique medley from *Brave* (2012) used Celtic fiddle, Celtic harp, whistles, Uilleann pipes, and bagpipes to create the setting of a mythical ancient Scotland. This was the first Pixar movie to have a female protagonist.

Kaufmann added a final pastiche by all the composers that even included their photos to close the evening. This was followed by a rousing fireworks display accompanying the audience's departure.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 2, 2013*