

Preview

Contemporary Youth Orchestra to explore music of Pixar, Disney and Marvel on March 15

by Daniel Hathaway



Those of us (of a certain age) who grew up watching the animated films (call them cartoons if you must) of the mid-twentieth century received a subliminal dose of well-crafted music that would hold up well in the concert hall — and probably turned us in a good musical direction as a result.

Now the film music of Disney, Pixar and Marvel *has* moved from celluloid into symphonic circles, as The Cleveland Orchestra has recently been proving in performances at Blossom. On Saturday, March 15 at 7 pm in Waetjen Auditorium at CSU, the next generation of orchestral musicians will tackle that repertory as Liza Grossman leads the Contemporary Youth Orchestra in its annual Music and Its Industry concert, "The Sound of Imagination: Music of Pixar, Disney and Marvel."

The performance will mark the seventh time that Grossman has collaborated with Case Western Reserve University musicologist Daniel Goldmark in designing and providing narrative context for its midwinter concert. It all began in 2007 when Grossman read Goldmark's 2005 book, *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon* and decided she wanted to begin a collaboration. Thus Goldmark, who teaches pop music, film and animation — and who said in a telephone conversation, "anyone who gets paid to listen to cartoons for a living is very, very lucky" — has acted as educational liason to CYO and has narrated half a dozen of the orchestra's "Music and Its Industry" performances.



The specific catalyst for the March 15 CYO concert was, appropriately, a student in the orchestra. "Four years ago," Grossman told us on the phone, "Eric Poe, who is now our principal percussionist and together with his three siblings and parents are great Disney fans, came to me and said we should do a Disney show. I told him, if you're still around when you're a senior, we will. Last spring, he reminded me that he was going to be a senior next year, so I looked for a way to make Disney work within the scheme of Music and Its Industry."

In brainstorming with Goldmark and her CYO team, Grossman decided that it all had to do with establishing a brand. "When you look at the word Coca-Cola and the way it's set up you immediately know what it's all about. I believe that Disney put the same kind of thought into the sound of their cartoons as they did with the look of their visuals. If I blindfolded you and played the first three notes of "When you wish upon a star," you'd immediately know it's from a Disney film. The whole point of 'Music and Its Industry' is to teach that there's a commercial as well as a spiritual value to what composers do. You can be creative and still make a living."

Grossman and Goldmark spent a couple of hours in a coffee shop talking over what should end up on the program. "We wanted to make sure we hit all the different time periods from the classics then into the 80s and today," Grossman said. "It was impossible to choose everything, but we wanted to begin with Daniel's historical knowledge and then decide what would be best for the orchestra."



Goldmark added, "Liza and I chose music that was challenging, interesting and what the musicians know and want to play." That included one non-film item that was originally conceived with a live narrator. "In 1945, before anybody did the 'let's project the film on a big screen while the musicians play the music', Edward Plumb, who was in on the original scoring, did an 8-10 minute orchestral version of *Bambi* for a performance in Hollywood Bowl. The narrator tells the story — Bambi's birth, the fire, meeting everyone in the forest, but with the main moment — which will go unspoken — left out."

That *Bambi* piece will be on the concert, but in the way that generational patterns work, was a story new to many of the students. "They know it now," said Grossman, who actually assigned the film as homework and invited her students to a movie night in CSU's Drinko Hall for further background studies.

Owing to rights issues, only about a third of the playlist will be from the Disney studios; the rest comes from Pixar and Marvel productions and all the music will be accompanied by film clips Grossman has spent some 80 hours timing out to the music. A latecomer to the program is "Let it go." "I was having dinner with a CYO parent," Grossman said. "Her daughter, who plays in the orchestra, and her friends were excited about the concert and suggested we do the song from *Frozen*." That was a surprise for Grossman, who didn't know the Academy Award-winning number, but she got out her iPad and watched a video and immediately made arrangements to play it on the concert. "I like to show the students how I can do business quickly," she noted, making that a teachable moment.

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