

Review: Cleveland Orchestra Sci-Fi Spectacular at Blossom (July 13)

by Guytano Parks



Science Fiction proved to be a winning theme this past Sunday evening as throngs of avid and enthusiastic fans of the genre packed the Blossom Music Center pavilion and filled the lawn to hear The Cleveland Orchestra's *Sci-Fi Spectacular*. Jack Everly, one of North America's leading symphonic pops conductors, was at the helm on this occasion, with none other than George Takei as narrator, beloved for his portrayal of Mr. Sulu in the acclaimed television and film series *Star Trek*.

Soprano Kristen Plumley and members of the Blossom Festival Chorus joined the Orchestra in music by John Williams, John Barry, Michael Giacchino and Bernard Herrmann.

John Williams's rousing "Main Title" from *Star Wars* opened the program. Everly conducted with authority, yet he also communicated his ideas with subtle tilts of the head and dance-like motions. The orchestra responded to every gesture with polish and pizzazz. The brass and woodwinds played brilliantly, and the contrasting eerie and mystical sections were effectively played by the strings, harps and bells. The driving percussion kept things marching forward with great excitement.

The familiar, rapidly repeating triplet patterns and eerie whistling of the theme from *The X Files* began a set arranged by Everly called "Lost in Syndication." The clever medley included other well-known TV themes including *The Jetsons* and *The Twilight Zone*. (Later, Everly conducted a pop quiz asking a selected member of the audience to name five of the television show themes included in the medley. The prize was a *Star Wars* lightsaber, presented by soprano Kristen Plumley dressed as Princess Leia.)

The famous ten-minute chase scene, "Adventures on Earth" from Stephen Spielberg's 1982 film, *E.T. (The Extra-Terrestrial)* followed. Spielberg so admired John Williams's

music as a composition that he coordinated the action on the screen to go with the music. Hearing this music again – played so superbly – one couldn't help but relive the original experience of having seen what is widely regarded as the defining film of the 80s.

John Barry's theme from *Somewhere In Time* was played with bittersweet tenderness. Long, legato lines swelled and subsided as the chorus joined in. The musicians embraced every note of this poignant and nostalgic moment. Everly acknowledged the late actor Christopher Reeve for his role in this film, and for his portrayal of Superman. *The Superman March* by John Williams followed, changing the mood back to the festive.

Finally, George Takei took to the Blossom stage greeted by an uproarious ovation. He spoke eloquently about his experiences as a young man cast in the new Sci-Fi television series *Star Trek*. He explained the symbolism of diversity and acceptance among the individual characters and their roles on the starship *Enterprise* and revealed how his character's name, Mr. Sulu came about. (The executive producer of the series did not wish to favor one Asian heritage over another — names refer to specific countries — so he looked to a map on his office wall and spotted the Sulu Sea, which touched the shores of many parts of Asia.)

Plumley appeared in a *Star Trek* costume to sing the oohs and aahs of the *Star Trek* theme by Alexander Courage as part of the “Star Trek Through the Years” medley, arranged by Calvin Custer. All forces involved delivered soaring performances, making us feel as if we'd gone to a place “where no man has gone before.”

The Theme from *2001: A Space Odyssey* – as the opening section of Richard Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra* is popularly known – made a powerful impression after intermission. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* by John Williams was haunting with its unusual and exotic sounds. Music from *Star Trek 2009* by Michael Giacchino was exciting and rhythmic and featured the rhapsodic and lush female voices of the Chorus.

The Cantina Band (bar scene) from *Star Wars* was not listed in the program, giving Everly the opportunity to set up a joke by saying that they'd now perform something rather serious and important. The comical, Klezmer-like music was met with its intended laughter. Plumley was featured again in the ominous music from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* by Bernard Herrmann. Takei then delivered Klaatu's Speech from the end of the 1951 film. Its anti-war message still resounds more than a half-century later.

“When You Wish Upon A Star” from Disney's *Pinocchio* by Harline and Washington was radiantly sung by Plumley and luxuriously backed by the orchestra just before the two final works by John Williams. “Duel of the Fates” from *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* conveyed the sinister, full of horror and mystery as the chorus sang words in Sanskrit while the orchestra played in a menacing and martial manner. “The Throne

Room” and “End Title” from *Star Wars* closed this entertaining program on an exuberantly optimistic note.

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