

# AROUND TOWN



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Photograph by Michael Gibson

Violinist and concertmaster Julian Brown will perform a featured solo in Massenet's 'Meditation' from 'Thaïs' in the Silicon Valley Symphony's 'From the New World' performances on May 16 at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos.

## Orchestra to play 'From the New World'

*Symphony performs  
May 16 in Los Gatos*

By HEATHER ZIMMERMAN

It's not uncommon for some musical groups to play songs by audience request, but for its season closer the Silicon Valley Symphony will perform a selection by orchestra request.

Of course, all of the works on the program are certain to be music to the ears of the audience as well.

The symphony concludes its season with "From the New World" on

May 16, 8 p.m., at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos, 16575 Shannon Road.

The Silicon Valley Symphony is a community, all-volunteer orchestra. To program the season finale concert, Silicon Valley Symphony music director and conductor Michael Gibson sought the orchestra's input. "I asked the musicians in the orchestra what they would like to do. Many people wanted to play the *New World Symphony* by Antonin Dvorak," Gibson says.

In fact the concert takes its name from Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, a well-loved composition that will be the grand finale of the

concert.

"From the New World" also includes Berlioz's *Roman Carnival Overture*, and Ravel's *Pavane for a Dead Princess*, as well as such popular pieces as "Meditation" from Massenet's opera *Thaïs* and Mendelssohn's *The Hebrides Overture, Op. 26 (Fingal's Cave)*. Even if some listeners don't know the names of the two latter works, their tunes will be familiar, Gibson says.

*The Hebrides Overture* is on the program to mark the bicentennial in 2009 of the birth of composer Felix Mendelssohn.

"[I chose it] for no particular

reason other than I love it," Gibson says. "I've been wanting to perform it for a long time—and the orchestra loves it, too."

Gibson notes the Dvorak, Massenet and Mendelssohn works were all named last year as "Classical All Stars" by well regarded classical radio station KDFC. "Over a long period of time, they remain favorites of the vast majority of people who like classical music," Gibson says. "If something is written 200 years ago and still people love to play it and flock to hear it, that's the test of time."



# Symphony

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Violinist Julian Brown, as the symphony's concertmaster, will solo in Massenet's "Meditation" from *Thaïs*.

"The Meditation has become one of the world's favorite encore pieces for violin and orchestra. Its warm, romantic melody and operatic roots give the violin a chance to shine," Brown says, "so although the piece doesn't entail technical fireworks to perform, it sounds like a showpiece and, in my view, requires great passion and gusto to carry off."

"It requires real depth and maturity of sound and the ability to play beautifully very slowly," Gibson says of the "Meditation."

This is Brown's second season with the Silicon Valley Symphony and his first as concertmaster, a title that describes the leader of the first section of violins in an orchestra. Traditionally it's the position that assists the conductor

and plays any violin solos in orchestral works, unless there is a guest soloist.

Brown says that at an early age he was inspired to take up the violin by his own father's violin playing. By age 8, he was teaching himself to play violin, specifically the Mendelssohn violin concerto, by listening to recordings of the legendary violinist Jascha Heifetz, an icon for both Brown and his father.

Professionally, Brown has a wide background in science and media, working as a scientist, science writer and radio producer in his native Britain. For the past six years, he has worked at Stanford University's brain research lab.

Brown is also part-time concertmaster with the California Pops Orchestra.

"For me it's all about making that emotional connection," Brown says of performing. "If our performances help to inspire younger members of the audience to take up a musical instrument and to appreciate the great canon of musical works in the classical

repertoire, so much the better. But ultimately we just want people to have a good time."

After this concert season closes, music director Gibson has some changes ahead of him. For almost five years, he has worked as director of music ministries at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos, but due to the economy the church will be letting him go in June. He is looking to make his position with the symphony into a fulltime job and revive a music-in-the-schools outreach program.

However, as Gibson plans the Silicon Valley Symphony's next season, for the time being the symphony looks likely to continue playing at the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos. Gibson says the 2009-10 season may feature San Francisco Symphony cellist Lawrence Granger, as well as a guest artist or two from Opera San Jose.

*Tickets are \$20 general/\$15 seniors and students/children ages 12 and under free. For more information, call 408.873.9000 or [www.siliconvalleysymphony.net](http://www.siliconvalleysymphony.net).*