



REACHING OUT TO YOUNG HANDS - WHEN IT COMES TO CATCHING KIDS' INTEREST, THE KSO DOESN'T FIDDLE AROUND. IT SNARES THEM EARLY WITH FAMILIAR MUSIC AND UP-CLOSE LOOKS AT THE INSTRUMENTS THE MUSICIANS PLAY.

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A symphony builds its future in the here and now, says James Cassidy, musical director of the Kentucky Symphony Orchestra.

"That's why everything we do is outreach," says Cassidy.

Cassidy programs all the orchestra's series -- subscription concerts, summer park concerts and education concerts -- with the mantra of making classical music attractive and accessible.

"But students are the future of our world, and the future of the music industry," he said during an interview in the KSO's Newport office.

Cassidy says it's important to see children not only while they're in elementary school, but also at different points in their lives because of their changing tastes.

As a former high school teacher, Cassidy believes in making sure "what you give them is something students and teachers can use."

The KSO has played education concerts for 10 years. This year marks the debut of a major overhaul to the orchestra's efforts toward students.

The foundation remains "Getting To Know You," a program of concerts geared to students in grades 4 through 6. It focuses on introducing students to the instruments of the orchestra. The always sold-out concerts feature such musically diverse pieces as "Fanfare for the Common Man" by Aaron Copland and the theme from "The Simpsons" by Danny Elfman -- both pieces that the students are likely to have heard on television or radio.

Introducing the instruments at that point serves a dual purpose, too, Cassidy said, since most children have the option of joining their school bands at about that age.

The KSO's outreach programs offer concerts at no charge to students, even though they cost the orchestra, to the tune of \$100,000 a year.

The Procter & Gamble Fund has been a long-time sponsor, and a new KSO education program, dubbed "Rags to Riches," adds a new sponsor: Cleveland-based National City Bank, eager to get its name out in the community after its acquisition of Cincinnati's Provident Bank.

The program will be performed during Black History Month and features one of the KSO's subsidiary groups, the nine-piece Newport Ragtime Band, performing rags, blues and jazz arrangements by Terry LaBolt. Two free performances are set for Feb. 22 at Greaves Concert Hall on Northern Kentucky University's campus in Highland Heights. The band then goes on tour to schools (for a nominal charge) for four performances on Feb. 23 and Feb. 24.

Though replacing the full orchestra with a smaller group, Cassidy said the Ragtime Band still represents the true spirit of the KSO.

"Our symphony has been a little different since we first started," he said.

The new program has the trademark Cassidy touch -- combining local, all-American and black history components.

"It's a different type of classical," he said. "It's the musical heritage of this country."

All the composers -- some famous, like Scott Joplin, and others local -- have an "interesting story to tell from the standpoint of how they came up to be what they were," he said.

Schools interested in getting the full orchestra experience are invited to attend one of the KSO's open dress rehearsals. In that less formal atmosphere, students can see that the musicians are "just regular folks" as they put the "final touches on the game plan" -- an allusion to one of Cassidy's favorite analogies to the orchestra as football team. Cassidy will wear a body microphone so the audience can hear him talk and give direction to the orchestra.

Response to the open dress rehearsals has been favorable, with schools from as far away as Grant County and Augusta attending.

The first open dress rehearsal, targeted to grades 7 through 10, was Friday morning at Greaves Hall. "Classical Hit Parade" featured light classics rarely heard in concert today including "Night on Bald Mountain" by Mussorgsky and "Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna" by Suppe. (The symphony performs a regular subscription series concert at 8 tonight.)

The next open dress rehearsal is on Jan. 14, also at Greaves Hall. This concert is open to those in grades 11 and 12.

For more information about the KSO, call (859) 431-6216.

Caption: Photo (7)

Photos by Melvin Grier/The Post Students from St. Therese listen to the Kentucky Symphony Orchestra at a "Getting To Know You" performance at NKU's Greaves Concert Hall. The concerts are for students in grades 4 through 6. Familiar light classics will be the stars of KSO's "Classical Hit Parade" at 8 p.m. today at Greaves Concert Hall at NKU.

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