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CAL PHIL INVITES MUSIC LOVERS TO SPEND A NIGHT – OR AN AFTERNOON – AT THE OPERA

The California Philharmonic will present “Andrew Lloyd Webber Meets Puccini” on Saturday evening, July 12, at The Arboretum and Sunday afternoon, July 13, at Disney Hall

Calendar summary:

July 12: Andrew Lloyd Webber Meets Puccini

Featured soloists: Sopranos Valerie Perri & Angel Blue, and tenor Robert MacNeil

Program includes: excerpts from Webber’s blockbuster hits *Evita*, *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera* and Puccini’s operas *Tosca*, *La Boheme*, and *Madame Butterfly*

The Arboretum

301 N. Baldwin Ave in Arcadia

Gates open at 5:30 p.m; concert begins at 7:30 p.m.

626.300.8200 or purchase online, www.calphil.org

Tickets start at \$20

July 13: Andrew Lloyd Webber Meets Puccini

Featured soloists: Sopranos Valerie Perri & Angel Blue, tenor Robert MacNeil and organist Phil Smith

Program includes: excerpts from Webber’s blockbuster hits *Evita*, *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera* and Puccini’s operas *Tosca*, *La Boheme*, and *Madame Butterfly* as well as Bach’s *Toccatina and Fugue in D minor*

Walt Disney Concert Hall

111 South Grand Avenue in Los Angeles

Concert begins at 2 p.m.

For tickets, call 213.365.3500 or purchase online, www.ticketmaster.com

Tickets start at \$35

SAN MARINO, Calif. As Victor Vener, founder and music director of the California Philharmonic, sees it, if you fall in love with “the music of the night” in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s phenomenally successful production of *Phantom of the Opera*, there is absolutely no reason you can’t equally enjoy works by one of grand opera’s most renowned and revered composers, Giacomo Puccini.

On Saturday, July 12, at 7:30 p.m. at The Arboretum in Arcadia and Sunday, July 13, at 2 p.m. at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, Vener will make his musical case when Cal Phil presents “Andrew Lloyd Webber Meets Puccini.” On the program are excerpts from blockbuster musicals by Lloyd Webber, including *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, *Sunset Boulevard* and *Evita* as well as arias from such beloved Puccini operas as *La Boheme*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Gianni Schicci* and *Tosca*.

“Works by Lloyd Webber and Puccini have more in common than you may at first think,” explains Vener, whose mission since founding Cal Phil in 1995 has been to introduce audiences to what he calls “timeless great music,” whether it was written in the 21st century or the 16th. Last year’s season, for example, included an ‘Intergalactic Premiere’ of composer Roger Allen Ward’s earth: you are here and Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos.

“Both Lloyd Webber and Puccini make use of lush, lovely melodies, glorious orchestration and have great stories to tell,” Vener adds. “Truly, if you loved seeing *Phantom*, it’s a small step back in time to love *Boheme*, too, as our great orchestra and guest artists will show you.”

Soloists joining Cal Phil for the weekend of performances include *Evita* star Valerie Perri – hailed as “electrifying and sensational” by the Boston Globe – and operatic tenor Robert MacNeil, acclaimed by the San Diego Union Tribune for “his vocal gusto to enthrall an audience.” Soprano Angel Blue, a member of the Domingo-Thornton Young Artist Program at Los Angeles Opera who recently was a winner in the Metropolitan Opera’s National Council Auditions program, will appear as well.

Also, since fans of *Phantom* are well aware of the leading role the organ plays in the musical, Cal Phil has invited Phil Smith, Organ Conservator at Walt Disney Concert Hall, to join its cast for the weekend. Smith will perform Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D Minor.

“The *Toccata and Fugue* is instantly recognizable,” says Smith. “Not only does Max, the butler, play it in *Sunset Boulevard* but it’s often been used in by filmmakers, video game designers and even rock musicians. What I love about this particular performance,” Smith adds, “is that I’ll play the *Toccata* on the wonderful organ at Disney Hall, when Walt Disney himself featured the music in his film *Fantasia*.”

Meanwhile, Valerie Perri, who credits Lloyd Webber with launching her career – she was only 22, without even an Equity card to her name, when Broadway director Hal Prince cast her for Webber’s Los Angeles production of *Evita* – fully supports Vener’s decision to pair the colossus of musical theatre with opera legend Giacomo Puccini. “I always felt that Andrew’s passionate sweeping melodies could be compared to those of Puccini,” Perri explains. “I’m so glad to be part of this magical program. You couldn’t ask for more gorgeous music or spectacular entertainment.”

In 1992, Perri embarked upon a second World Tour of *Evita*... accompanied by her six week-old twin sons, Benjamin and Jack Lipson. Now accomplished musicians in their own right – the boys play piano, bass, drums and percussion and are enrolled in the music discipline at the LA County High School for the Arts – Benjamin and Jack Lipson will once again ‘accompany’ their mother. As infants, they sometimes took curtain calls with Perri; this time, they’ll perform with the orchestra while she is onstage.

“I might add, as a proud mother, that they have beautiful voices as well,” says Perri, who will perform “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina” from *Evita*, “Memory” from *Cats*, “All I Ask” from *Phantom of the Opera* with Robert MacNeil, and “As If We Never Said Goodbye” from *Sunset Boulevard*.

Like Perri’s sons, Los Angeles Opera Young Artist Angel Blue attended the LA County High School for the Arts. “There aren’t any words to describe the feeling of singing Puccini,” says the soprano, who will perform arias from *La Boheme*, *Gianni Schicci*, and *Tosca* with Cal Phil.

Blue readily admits that her favorite piece on the program is ‘Vissi d’arte’ -- ‘I lived for art’ – from *Tosca*. “The heroine, an opera singer named Tosca, is in the midst of this terrible situation, confronted with these hideously difficult choices when all she’s tried to do all her life is be a good person,” Blue explains. “She’s asking God how He could allow such things to happen to her. I love ‘Vissi d’arte’ because who hasn’t felt, at some point in their lives, just as Tosca does? That what makes opera so wonderful.”

While pageantry plays a leading role in the staging of most operas, Blue met the challenges of paying for voice lessons and college by earning scholarships and awards from a world with a slightly different concept of pageantry. Blue began her career in beauty pageants when she was 19-years old, becoming the first African-American to win Miss Apple Valley. In 2005, she was crowned Miss Hollywood and awarded 2nd runner up to Miss California. The following year, as Miss Southern California, the soprano became 1st runner up to Miss California. She also competed in the state of Nevada, and was 1st runner up there as well.

“For the talent portion of the competition I sang 2 minutes of ‘Sempre Libera’ from *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi,” recalls Blue, who made her professional debut with the Redlands Symphony in 2005 and, two years later, debuted at LA Opera as Musetta in *La Boheme*. “I always won the talent competition in every pageant I competed in,” adds Blue with a smile. “And I’ll do my best to win over the audience at Cal Phil, too.”

Tenor Robert MacNeil has already succeeded in reaching Blue’s goal. Back for his third appearance with the California Philharmonic, MacNeil – who has sung worldwide with musical organizations ranging from Los Angeles Opera and the Angeles Chorale to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the Central Union Philharmonic in Beijing – will perform “Recondita armonia” from *Tosca* and “Nessun dorma” from *Turandot*.

Yet while MacNeil has been hailed by the Los Angeles Times as “an up-and-coming figure on the operatic stage,” he is equally comfortable – and renowned – in the world of musical theatre. “I’ll be singing two duets composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber as well,” reveals the singer, who was recently named Most Outstanding Graduate Student from the Thornton School of Music at USC. “I’m really looking forward to working once again with Cal Phil and appearing at two such exciting venues.”

“There’s a method to our musical madness,” adds Victor Vener with a smile. “If it’s great music, Cal Phil brings it to you. And the same can be said for our venues. They’re as eclectic as our programming, whether it’s The Arboretum and Walt Disney Concert Hall in the summer or the Ambassador Auditorium and Pasadena Civic Auditorium in the winter. It’s all part of our goal to make glorious music as indispensable a part of your life as it is in ours.”

The gates will open at The Arboretum on July 12 at 5:30 p.m. for dining and live jazz from the redwhite+bluezz Jazz Stage, with the performance beginning at 7:30 p.m. Tickets start at just \$20 and can be purchased by calling the Cal Phil box office at 1120 Huntington Drive in San Marino at 626.300.8200 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday or by visiting the website, www.calphil.org. The Arboretum is located at 301 No. Baldwin Avenue in Arcadia. Gates open at 5:30 p.m. for picnicking.

Tickets for the performance at 2 p.m. on July 13 are available by calling TicketMaster at 213.363.3500, Tuesday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. or online at www.ticketmaster.com. Prices range from \$35 to \$95/person. Walt Disney Concert Hall is located at 111 South Grand Avenue in Los Angeles.

In 1995, Music Director and Conductor Victor Vener and a small group of enthusiastic, dedicated music lovers based in Pasadena, California founded The CalPhil Foundation. The Foundation, a nonprofit community benefit organization, supports the California Philharmonic in its quest to expand awareness of classical music, thus increasing the interest and support for great timeless music with wide audience appeal, from the classical and operatic repertoire to diverse genres of jazz, pops, Hollywood and Broadway. Also, with a strong commitment to new music and to expanding the symphonic repertoire, the California Philharmonic has presented numerous world premieres of both orchestral and chamber works.

The California Philharmonic began in 1997 with a five-concert inaugural summer season of Cal Phil Festival on the Green on the grounds of the Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden in Arcadia. Now, Cal Phil presents twenty-four concerts per year in five different, but equally impressive, venues throughout Los Angeles County. These series include Cal Phil at Walt Disney Concert Hall (downtown Los Angeles), Cal Phil at the Ambassador (Pasadena), Cal Phil Music, Martinis and the Maestro (Castle Green Hotel in Pasadena), Cal Phil Festival on the Green, and Cal Phil at The Mill (The Old Mill in San Marino). For more information, visit www.calphil.org or call 626.300.8200.

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