

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Get set for the Bowl's Looney night

The L.A. Phil gets into the act in 'Bugs Bunny at the Symphony II,' where cartoons stir memories.

BY DANA FERGUSON

Warner Bros., where Bugs Bunny was born in 1940, understood the power of music.

The studio's Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies cartoon series avidly used refrains from Wagner, Rossini and Brahms, showed Bugs Bunny as an orchestra conductor, ballet dancer and an opera singer, and sometimes offered parodies of noted operas.

A few years after Looney Tunes' inception in 1930 and Merrie Melodies' a year later, Warner Bros. brought on composer Carl Stalling as a staff member to set the animation to music. Stalling brought to the table experience as an organist as well as a music aficionado. He incorporated Warner Bros. songs from feature films into his scores, as the studio required, but he also drew extensively from contemporary music and classical repertoire.

More than 70 years later audiences still enjoy those cartoons and Stalling's compositions that accompany them. Conductor George Daugherty enjoyed them so much that he decided to bring the characters and melodies back to life.

Daugherty, who will direct the Los Angeles Philharmonic in the "Bugs Bunny at the Symphony II" concert Friday and Saturday at the Hollywood Bowl, has been touring the world for 24 years, screening the cartoon clips and conducting the music that accompanies them.

The conductor pursued music as a youngster because he was drawn to the cartoons' classical pieces. "It's a really unique American cultural phenomenon because anyone in their 20s or 30s or 40s or 50s grew up on these cartoons, they received exposure to classical music whether or not they knew it," Daugherty said. "I definitely felt like I could do it because I saw Bugs at the podium, conducting."

Daugherty, based in San Francisco, has conducted for orchestras, ballet companies and opera houses around the world. He has



Photographs from ©WB/EI

THE NEW cartoon short "I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat" will be shown in 3-D at the Bowl concert.



"COYOTE FALLS" features Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote.

five Emmy nominations for collaborating on PBS and ABC projects.

To transport viewers to memories of Saturday mornings, the program features the cartoons displayed on large screens with accompanying orchestration performed by the philharmonic. For this concert, audiences will also see two new cartoon shorts, "Coyote Falls" and "I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat," which feature Wile E. Coyote, the Road Runner, Sylvester and Tweety Bird in 3-D animation.

"Coyote Falls" was released in 2010 and was shown before screenings of "Cats & Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore." "I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat," featuring the vocal stylings of Mel Blanc and the voice

of June Foray, was shown before "Happy Feet Two" in 2011.

Daugherty said for the generations who grew up with the Looney Tunes cartoons, the pieces featured in the program will trigger instant memories and smiles.

He recalled a memory of his own seeing "Rabbit of Seville," in which Elmer Fudd chases Bugs Bunny onto the stage at the Hollywood Bowl during a performance of "The Barber of Seville." Bugs raises the curtain on Elmer, trapping him on-stage, and takes on the roll of the barber, eager to give Elmer a grooming he'll never forget. At one point Elmer and Bugs take their barber chairs to great heights as they chase each other.

"I tried to crank my barber chair

through the ceiling and naturally I was disappointed when it didn't work," Daugherty said.

Christopher Lennertz, the composer for Warner Bros.' recent 3-D animated short "I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat," said the music in Looney Tunes inspired his as well.

"A big reason that I score movies is because movie music is something I remember really fondly from being a kid," Lennertz said. "I would submerge myself in the characters I loved and play the music along with them. Looney Tunes was definitely a part of that."

Lennertz said Stalling sampled small sections of different songs, both classical and contemporary, to accompany the images on-screen. Using phrases from different scores he could create a tone or insinuate guilt or danger — or just about anything — with a few notes.

"People have pre-conceived notions of what these pieces mean," Lennertz said. "Snippets of songs can convey an emotion or tone really effectively really quickly."

Lennertz used an example of music from Bizet's "Carmen." He said that often the music from the opera is used to convey a "sneaky" tone, Stalling helped build that deeper meaning for the music in the cartoons.

These phrases reappear in different works, making them instantly recognizable. The genera-

'Bugs Bunny at the Symphony II'

Where: Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles

When: 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Cost: \$17 to \$181.50

Info: (323) 850-2000 or www.hollywoodbowl.com

tions who grew up watching the cartoons can identify the characters as well, but for younger viewers this isn't always the case.

Matthew O'Callaghan, director of "I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat," said one challenge with characters such as Bugs Bunny or Tweety Bird is that they must be reinvented to remain relevant to new generations. He tried to stay as true to the characters as possible, he said, but the new technology of 3-D allowed for features such as texture in Tweety's feathers and colored irises.

"By taking a property and putting a new package around it and putting it out there, you can keep a character alive," O'Callaghan said. "If we were to continue to keep making these and putting them out there it would have a better effect on making them an icon again."

Though the clips are online and were shown before the feature films, they weren't widely publicized. "Bugs Bunny at the Symphony II" will mark the first time they'll be performed for a large audience.

Lennertz said he hopes the audience will receive them well and will continue to be interested in shorter cartoon clips. "In the day and age of Twitter and Facebook and short spurts of videos, it's the perfect time for this kind of thing."

After 24 years of "Bugs Bunny at the Symphony," Daugherty said he hopes these tweaks to the program keep it relevant, especially to young viewers.

"We are really trying to perpetuate a legacy of these cartoons," Daugherty said. "The world has changed, Saturday mornings have changed and how we are exposed to these cartoons has changed. We're trying to make sure kids still get exposed to these cartoons."

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