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Walter Tunis: Steve Forbert returns with distinctive folk-pop

## With Bugs Bunny program, Picnic With the Pops promises to be animated

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Tweety and Sylvester star in the Looney Tunes 3D theatrical short *I Tawt I Taw A Puddy Tat*, one of the new cartoons that will be shown during Picnic With the Pops' program Bugs Bunny at the Symphony II.

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By Rich Copley — [rcopley@herald-leader.com](mailto:rcopley@herald-leader.com)

George Daugherty would hazard a bet that if you walked down the street and hummed the tune to Richard Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*, you would get the same thing back from a majority of adults: "Kill the wabbit! Kill the wabbit!"

Kill the rabbit?

That is, of course, the chorus Elmer Fudd repeats numerous times in the classic Bugs Bunny cartoon *What's Opera, Doc?*, which marries Wagner's epic *Ring Cycle* music to Fudd's epic quest for *hasenpfeffer*, or other rabbit delicacies.

Daugherty's isn't the first — but it might be the most emphatic — admission that many people, particularly Americans, got their first tastes of classical music through Warner Bros. cartoons. Cases in point: *Rabbit of Seville* (a spoof of Gioachino Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*), *Baton Bunny* (which uses Franz von Suppé's *A Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna*), *Rhapsody Rabbit* (employing *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* by Franz Liszt) and *Tom and Jerry in the Hollywood Bowl* (which includes Johann Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus*).

Daugherty has made a career of those first loves with concerts including *Bugs Bunny at the Symphony II*, which he brings to Lexington this weekend for the annual Picnic with the Pops concerts. He will conduct the Lexington Philharmonic in playing the music to accompany those and other cartoon classics, plus two new films.

"It's like a film festival with fantastic live music," he says.

It also turns the Philharmonic into something akin to a Hollywood studio orchestra, albeit with a slightly more demanding task ahead of its players.

"When the old Warner Bros. Orchestra of the 1930s and '40s recorded these scores, they only had to deal with one score at a time," Daugherty says. "Each cartoon is about seven minutes long, and they would break the scores up into eight different sections, or cues, as we call them. So the orchestra would only have to deal with cue 1, which was maybe 45 seconds long. They would rehearse and rehearse and rehearse that cue until they perfected it, and then they would record it, then go on to cue 2 and do the same thing.

"So they were never asked to record a cartoon from beginning to end in one fell swoop. What we're asking our orchestras to do, including the Lexington Philharmonic, is not only to play the cartoon beginning to end, but play about 10 of them."

The concert will include a number of the beloved cartoons such as *What's Opera Doc?*, and Daffy Duck's *Duck Amuck*, with music by Carl W. Stalling, who also arranged and orchestrated most of the classical music homages. Those include *Long-Haired Hare*, the one where Bugs' opera star neighbor unwisely picks a fight with the wascally wabbit.

The performance also includes two new computer-animated cartoons: *I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat* featuring Tweety and Sylvester, and *Coyote Falls* with the Road Runner and the hapless Wile E. Coyote.

The format of the concert requires the orchestra to reorient itself a bit, Daugherty says. One thing he has noticed over the years of presenting the Warner Bros. cartoon shows is that on the more familiar music, such as the *Barber of Seville Overture*, musicians have a tendency to slip into familiar modes of playing the pieces, which they can't do.

"In a normal classical music concert, you can really go with the flow," Daugherty says. "When you're accompanying a film that keeps rolling forward at the same speed, no matter what you do, you have to keep up with it. So, if a violin solo is particularly beautiful, there is no expanding it or breathing with or allowing it to have a little extra time. You just keep going.

"That's not to say there isn't attention to beauty or detail. It's just a different way of approaching it."

And though these are cartoons, Daugherty says, no one should begrudge them their format or popularity.

"These are not bad things," he says. "They're not disgraceful things, because the cartoons don't make fun of music. They don't demean the music.

"They're brilliant parodies in the same way as Anna Russell or Victor Borge or P.D.Q. Bach — brilliant parodies and satires. If they are insulted by the parodies, they don't have a sense of humor and have been hiding under a rock for most of their lives."

Besides, if it weren't for Bugs Bunny and his animated compatriots calling these tunes as pajama-wearing children crunched their cereal on Saturday morning, a lot of these pieces would be known only to serious classical music fans.

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## IF YOU GO

## Picnic With the Pops

**What:** *Bugs Bunny at the Symphony II*, a show of classic Warner Bros. cartoons featuring live orchestra accompaniment by the Lexington Philharmonic orchestra, conducted by George Daugherty

**When:** 8:30 p.m. Aug. 16 and 17. Gates open at 6.

**Where:** The Meadow at Keene Barn, Keeneland Race Course, 4201 Versailles Rd.

**Tickets:** General admission: \$15 adults, \$10 ages 12 and younger. Tables of eight: \$200-\$270, depending on location. Call (859) 233-3535 or go to [Lexpops.com](http://Lexpops.com).

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