

LONDON FREE PRESS Wednesday May 17, 2000

Orchestra London names new music director

Timothy Vernon takes up baton

By Joe Matyas Free Press Arts & Entertainment Reporter

Orchestra London, battling back from the brink of bankruptcy, expressed optimism about its future yesterday by announcing the appointment of Timothy Vernon as its new music director.

Vernon, one of the orchestra's most popular guest conductors in the last few years, was named new artistic leader by John St. Croix, chairperson of the board.

Vernon expressed confidence the orchestra can overcome its financial problems and that it's on the brink of "rebirth."

"We can give London's musical culture fresh energy and stronger presence," he said.

The appointment is contingent on the orchestra satisfying its creditors by May 31, said St. Croix, adding, "If we do it, then we're solvent, we have an orchestra and Timothy Vernon will be a big part of our future."

St. Croix said the orchestra has raised \$293,000 of the \$330,000 goal it must reach by the end of the month to avoid bankruptcy. "So far, the public has said it wants this orchestra to survive and it will if we can raise another \$37,000."

Vernon, a small wiry bundle of energy who has been artistic director of Pacific Opera Victoria since its inception in 1980, was the overwhelming choice of Orchestra London's board and musicians, said St. Croix.

"He's a magnetic personality he's open to change and these are qualities we need to make our new game plan work."

"He (Timothy Vernon) knows what he wants and he gets down to work. He's totally engaged in the process of making music and inspires us to be, too." *David Haward, general manager and bassoonist with Orchestra London*

David Haward, general manager and a bassoonist with the orchestra, described Vernon as "a very musical and experienced conductor who knows how to get the best out of people. He's very energetic, both in rehearsals and in performances."

Haward said rehearsals pass by quickly with Vernon.

“He’s focused. He knows what he wants and he gets down to work. He’s totally engaged in the process of making music and inspires us to be, too.”

Vernon will be the sixth music director in the 51-year history of the orchestra.

The last one was Mark Laycock, who left at the end of the 1997-'98 season, complaining he couldn't live with a new style of group management involving administrators and musicians that, had eroded his artistic leadership.

Brian Jackson, the orchestra's pops conductor for two decades, stepped into the void as principal conductor for the last two years.

“We are very grateful to Brian for his contribution to the orchestra,” said Haward. “He’s an important part of this organization and will remain with us as principal pops conductor.”

The orchestra has employed a succession of guest conductors for its Masterworks and Sinfonia programs for the last two seasons and Vernon was one of the most impressive.

“We still have a team here, but Timothy Vernon will be very much in charge and we’ll be looking to him for leadership in all artistic matters,” said Haward.

“He’ll be the boss.”

St. Croix said Vernon has the kind of personality to which people are attracted.

“We think Tim will be a drawing card as our maestro.”