



Interview with Maestra Emily Ray, Part One

December 26, 2017



In 1996 Maestra Emily Ray formed the Mission Chamber Orchestra of San Jose, continuously serving as its Music Director and Conductor. Let's get to know what shapes her as a musician and leader in this interview with Journalist, Author, and Principal of McClellan Creative, Loretta McClellan:

Loretta McClellan: What event, moment or experience brought you to classical music appreciation, and when?

Maestra Emily Ray: My father used to play classical music at home when I was a child. I liked dancing to it.

LM: Are you a musician as well as a conductor? What instrument/s did you study, and which do you still play?

ER: I've played piano since I was seven and play when necessary (accompanying a soloist, playing for a church service, and on rare occasions for pleasure). I picked up the violin in 6th grade and played for three years, then stopped until I was a junior in college and basically had to start all over again. I played in college, community, and professional orchestras for a while. I only play violin now when bowing parts or demonstrating technique for my high school students.

LM: What is/are your favorite classical music piece/s? Who were your pop/rock or contemporary influences?

ER: Beethoven's symphonies and concertos are some of my favorite works, along with a couple of Mahler's symphonies. I didn't listen to much pop music. I sort of liked the Beach Boys for a while, but I didn't even like the Beatles.

LM: Who is/are your favorite classical composer/s? Favorite Contemporary Composer/s?

ER: Beethoven is my favorite classical composer. There are several contemporary composers whose music is very good: Craig Bohmler, Henry Mollicone, Lee Actor, Brian Holmes, Nancy Bloomer Deussen, Miguel del Aguila.

LM: Out of all the Mission Chamber Orchestra of San Jose concerts you have conducted, which concert/s and/or signature piece/s do you recall that touched the hearts of the audience in an exceptional way? And you personally?

ER: I think one of the most special concerts we performed was our "International Friendship Celebration" concert in 2003. We commissioned Craig Bohmler to write a work for our orchestra plus chorus and children's chorus. The work was called "Sisters" and was based on the theme of San Jose and her seven sister cities. We premiered the work at the St. Joseph Cathedral Basilica and also performed a Mozart violin concerto and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on the same concert. Each piece received a standing ovation. This is especially unusual when there is a world premiere involved. It was a sold-out concert and people loved it.

LM: For the remaining concerts of Season 17-18, what do you anticipate for each?

ER: Pasquale Esposito, our tenor soloist for the February 10th concert, is very popular. He has a lot of charisma, and the audience feels his sincerity and love of music when he performs, so I am looking forward to that. Likewise, people who attended our first SoundByte Symphony last March raved about it. I'm hoping we'll duplicate that success with SoundByte Symphony 2.0. For our April 21st concert, we will be performing an unusual work, *Postcards from the Sky*, by Canadian composer Marjan Mozetich. I think it's a very cool work and I hope the audience likes it as much as I do.

Stay tuned for the next installment in this interview series.



Interview with Maestra Emily Ray, Part Two

January 5, 2018



In 1996 Maestra Emily Ray formed the Mission Chamber Orchestra of San Jose, continuously serving as its Music Director and Conductor. Let's get to know what shapes her as a musician and leader in this interview with Journalist, Author, and Principal of McClellan Creative, Loretta McClellan:

Loretta McClellan: What is your music education and teacher/s? Where did you study? Since what age? What nuance did they teach you that you still carry with you today?

Maestra Emily Ray: I have a bachelor's degree in music from U.C. Berkeley and an M.A. in Music History and Literature from California State University Hayward (now East Bay), where I studied with Denis de Coteau, former Music Director of the San Francisco Ballet. I have also attended conducting workshops by Gustav Meier, Marin Alsop, Gunther Schuller and others. One thing that was impressed upon me strongly by Denis de Coteau was not to waste time at rehearsals.

LM: Which classical composer/s influence and/or strengthen you as a musician and/or conductor? Who speaks to your heart personally?

ER: There are many works that I like very much and that speak to me, e.g. Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Guitar Concerto No. 1 just says "Italy" to me, but Beethoven's music is what I always come back to, like an old friend.

LM: If you could spend one hour with a classical composer/s and/or musician/s, living or dead, who would it be, what would you ask/discuss?

ER: Again, since Beethoven is my favorite composer, I'd probably want to spend time with him, but only if he were in a good mood! His 4th Symphony is full of energy, ebullience, and is probably one of the happiest pieces he wrote. I might ask him what was going on in his life to make him write such a piece.

LM: What is it about the musicians and the orchestra as a whole that truly shine during a performance, and as a collective body of humanity?

ER: I have always felt the MCOsj musicians perform with a lot of spirit. They play for the love of music and are passionate about sharing that love with their fellow human beings.

Stay tuned for the next installment in this interview series.



Interview with Maestra Emily Ray, Part Three January 12, 2018



In 1996 Maestra Emily Ray formed the Mission Chamber Orchestra of San Jose, continuously serving as its Music Director and Conductor. Let's get to know what shapes her as a musician and leader in this interview with Journalist, Author, and Principal of McClellan Creative, Loretta McClellan:

Loretta McClellan: Who is/are your composer hero/heroine/s? Why?

Maestra Emily Ray: I do admire Joseph Curiale for his generous donation of time to help people who are underprivileged and live in poorer areas of the world.

LM: Classical Music is emotionally captivating and Valentine's Day is just around the corner. If someone were to declare profound love to another, what would you consider the epic classical piece/s to enhance it?

ER: I think the love theme in Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy-Overture* is a great expression of what we feel when we're in love.

LM: The ultimate battle symphony or classical "Break-up Song?"

ER: Maybe this isn't answering your question exactly as stated, but I think the slow movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, "Eroica", is a profound expression of grief.

LM: What is it about the MCOsj that keeps the audience coming back and growing, Season after Season?

ER: Expressive soloists who create excitement, solid performances of classical works, and positive experiences with contemporary music.

LM: How has the MCOsj enhanced music education for children, youth and adults in Silicon Valley? How would you envision that as it grows in depth and breadth?

ER: Our side-by-side activities in which high school string players perform in concerts next to our musicians has been an inspiration to many of the young people involved. The experience shows them there is a way they can remain involved in music as they navigate through college and into careers.

LM: Some say that Classical Music is dying or dead. What is your experience to the contrary, particularly with the MCOsj?

ER: "Classical" music is named that because it has a timeless appeal. Not everyone enjoys classical music, but enough people do that the same works have been enjoyed by many generations of listeners and musicians from amateur to professional. So I don't think it will ever really die, and it certainly is not dead. On the contrary, the MCOsj tries to reach out to new audiences and introduce them to symphonic music they may not have yet discovered and come to appreciate.



We hope you enjoyed our interview series with Maestra Ray. See you at our upcoming performances!