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Memo: El Camino

Youth Symphony

Annual Benefit Concert

(box) Where: Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, 500 Castro St.

(box) When: 7:30 p.m. Sunday

(box) Tickets: \$15, \$10 students/seniors

(box) Call (650) 903-6000, (650) 327-2611

(box) Also: Preview program, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Messiah Lutheran Church, 1835 Valota Road, Redwood City, \$15, \$10 students/seniors, (650) 369-5201

CONDUCTING YOUTH FULFILLING FOR CELLIST

NORA VILLAGRAN, Mercury News Staff Writer

TO THE MUSIC world, Michail Gelfandbein is known as a cellist.

But to the members of the El Camino Youth Symphony in Palo Alto, he is a conductor whose cello expertise may come as a pleasant surprise this weekend when the Russian-born musician is featured Sunday at the symphony's annual benefit concert in Mountain View and at a preview performance Saturday in Redwood City.

"People who really know Michail Gelfandbein as an artist are sometimes shocked when they find out that he is conducting our beginning orchestra, Chamber Players," says El Camino's Cathy Spieth. "Most of the students have no idea that their conductor has played in the greatest halls in the world, been conducted by (Mstislav) Rostropovich and (Dmitri) Shostakovich, performed premieres in Leningrad of major pieces."

Gelfandbein, 62, will perform the world premiere of Daniel Simpson's "Poeme" for cello and orchestra this weekend, and Tchaikovsky's "Variations on a Rococo Theme."

Simpson, who lives in San Carlos, based "Poeme" on "The Last Leaf," a short story by O. Henry. Simpson has written music for films, television, commercials and computer software.

The program, conducted by the orchestra's music director, Camilla **Kolchinsky**, also includes works by Liszt, Handel-Harty and Gershwin.

Kolchinsky, who has headed the organization for five years, engineered Gelfandbein's dual role.

Kolchinsky and Gelfandbein became friends and colleagues several decades ago in Leningrad, where she was earning a doctorate in conducting at the State Music Conservatory of Leningrad and launching a conducting career abroad.

Gelfandbein joined the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra in 1962. He also taught at the Leningrad Conservatory and the Leningrad State School of Conductors.

In 1981, he and his family moved to Israel, where he founded and conducted the Rishon-Le-Zion Chamber Group and served as co-principal cellist of the Israel Opera Orchestra.

Kolchinsky and Gelfandbein teamed up again when he joined the El Camino group two years ago.

The El Camino Youth Symphony is in its 36th season as a performing group with a teaching program. Under its wing are nine ensembles, such as the El Camino Flute Ensemble and the Galbraith Honor Strings. The program also includes a summer workshop and summer tour. Annual auditions are held in May. The advanced chamber-music seminar takes place in June. And workshops for beginning and intermediate students begin in July.

Gelfandbein also teaches at the Silicon Valley Youth Conservatory. No wonder cello can get overlooked.

"Conducting allows me to express so much more musically," says Gelfandbein. "You can think of an orchestra as a very big instrument, with a very big ability to express itself. . . . Conducting is like playing this very big instrument. There is the opportunity for rich expression. This is what I try to communicate to my students and to my audiences."

Illustration:Photo

PHOTO: Michail Gelfandbein
Performing at weekend benefit
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