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Old and New

Concert offers French classics and local's latest work

By: [Ty Bowers](#)

April 9, 2008

He had a choice to make, Daniel Asia recalled.

About 30 years ago, the Foothills resident received a commission to write music for the opening of an arts center at his former school in Seattle.

"The question was: Do I write a celebratory work, which was kind of expected ... or something different," the composer remembered.

As he weighed his options, Asia's mind filled with memories of a boyhood friend he lost, a young man who

might well have been a classmate and companion throughout his years at Lakeside School.

So, Asia decided to write music for his late friend, Jacob Rayman, who died fighting in Israel's 1973 Yom Kippur War. The title of Asia's musical remembrance, the one performed by a chorus and pianist at the Seattle arts center opening, alluded to that sorrowful event.

He called the work "Why (?)"

Rayman's family moved to Israel when he was in his early teens. The country's mandate that all able-bodied youths serve in the military put the young man on the front lines.

In the decades since Asia's homage debuted in Seattle, the composer has amassed numerous credits and commissions.

For 20 years, he has taught composition at the University of Arizona, where he heads the School of Music's composition department.

His works have been performed by orchestras throughout the country, including the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, which on Thursday and Friday, April 10 and 11, and Sunday, April 13, will perform a new, as-of-yet unheard version of Asia's "Why (?)"

From a seat in the crowd, Asia will finally hear his re-worked music in full orchestral form.

"It's kind of weird," he said. "No matter how many times you hear it in your mind's ear, it's different. It's kind of like giving birth to something new. You're discombobulated."

Asia's composition will open a symphony concert primarily devoted to various French composers' works. The concert, "Musique de La France," also will feature a solo performance by renowned pianist Cecile Licad.

By opening with an unknown work by a local composer, however, the TSO is simply stressing one of its most important roles in the community, according to Music Director George Hanson. "It's very important for regional orchestras to work with local talent."

Asia's work, commissioned last year by the **America Israel Friendship League** and the Brina Grusin family, should impress concertgoers, the conductor said. "He's a wonderful talent."

Licad's performance, on the other hand, highlights another facet of the TSO mission: bringing world-class talent to Tucson.

"She's the kind of performer you expect to see when you go to the Chicago Symphony or the Philadelphia Orchestra," Hanson said of Licad, who last played in Tucson in 1989.

The New Yorker magazine dubbed her "a pianist's pianist."

Licad first began studying music at 3 years old, alongside her mother, Rosario Licad, in the Philippines. At age 7 she debuted as a soloist with the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Philippines and later became one of the youngest ever to receive the coveted Leventritt Gold Medal.

This week, she'll perform Saint-Saëns' Piano Concerto No. 2 at the Tucson Music Hall, part of a larger program featuring Fauré's Suite from "Pelléas et Mélisande" and Debussy's "La Mer."

Licad's star power reflects TSO's reputation for giving big-time performers "satisfying artistic experiences," Hanson said.

The juxtaposition of Asia's modern work with classical French compositions should make for "an interesting" show, the conductor concluded.

For Asia, the latest rendition of a 30-year-old composition has offered him a chance to rethink the music entirely, or at least the ending.

In the original version, written for chorus and piano, the piece came to a “nice conclusion,” Asia said, perhaps even a tidy one. When he re-worked the piece for piano in 1983, the composer had the music fade at the end, “as if you were listening to a music box winding down.”

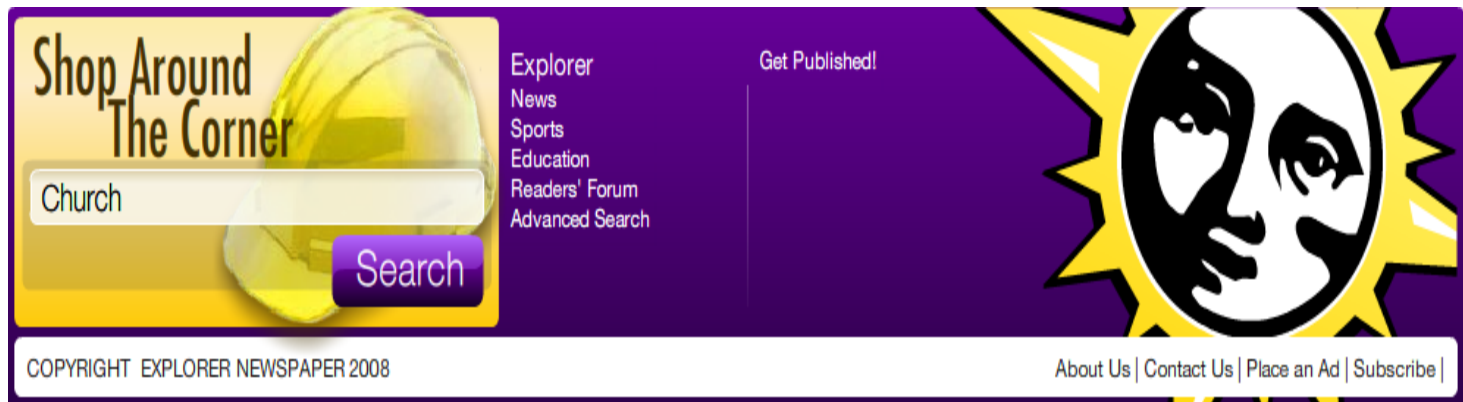
For the full orchestral rendition, to be unveiled this week, Asia opted for a different ending, one that has a “gentle, sweet” sound.

Asia’s hesitant to call the work complete. What concertgoers will hear this week could be considered just a version of a perhaps never fully finished work.

“It’s 30 years old already,” Asia said of his composition. The music changes — albeit in small ways — with the passing of time.

But the memory that made it remains fresh in his mind.

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