

Kern Holoman Changes the Tempo

November 21, 2008

D. Kern Holoman, the Barbara K. Jackson Professor of Orchestral Conducting at UC Davis, will step down as conductor of the UC Davis Symphony Orchestra in June, ending a distinguished 30-year tenure.

He will lead the orchestra for the last time on Sunday evening, in a Golden Jubilee Concert at the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, which he helped to establish. The concert celebrates the symphony's 50th season.

"It's been a good run," Holoman wrote in the program notes for his farewell concert. "In the nostalgic moments, I think most of all about college students routinely achieving, individually and collectively, art and beauty of which none of us knew we were capable. ... There's no lack of fond memories, and the good times will continue."

Jessie Ann Owens, professor of music and dean of the UC Davis Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies, described Holoman as a "figure of uncommon talent and accomplishment."

"He is both a legendary teacher of Music 10 (an introductory undergraduate course) and an internationally acclaimed musicologist, known especially for his work on French composer Hector Berlioz," Owens said. "He has turned the UC Davis Symphony Orchestra into a superb ensemble and given us unforgettable performances. His vision and energy helped create the Mondavi Center. It would be impossible to overstate his contributions to music at UC Davis."

Holoman arrived at UC Davis in 1973 as a 26-year-old acting assistant music professor and became the UC Davis Symphony Orchestra's fourth conductor in 1978. An international search for the 61-year-old conductor's successor is under way, with a goal of appointing a new conductor by next summer.

Holoman will take the 2009-2010 academic year off to complete a new book and will return to campus afterward. Although he will no longer be symphony director, he plans to continue conducting occasionally.

Born in North Carolina, Holoman earned his bachelor's degree in music at Duke University, his M.F.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Princeton, and studied bassoon and conducting at the North Carolina School for the Arts/Accademia Musicale Chigiana Summer Sessions in Siena, Italy. He is a former Woodrow Wilson fellow, Fulbright-Hays fellow, and National Endowment for the Humanities research fellow. The French government in 1989 named him a chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and in 1999 elevated him to the rank of officier in the order. He is the author of nine books, including the first catalogue of Berlioz's works and the authoritative biography of the composer.

"His prolific and masterly writings have raised the prestige of the music department and of the university as a whole to new heights," said David Cairns, former chief music critic for the Sunday Times of London and also a Berlioz expert. "He has made the UC Davis Symphony, over the years, a potent force in California music-making and beyond, and in doing so has become a conductor of exceptional power and eloquence. He has also been a

consistently devoted and perceptive mentor to his students."

Closer to home, critics also give Holoman rave reviews. "In his 35 years on the music faculty of UC Davis, Kern Holoman made a multiply distinguished contribution, as teacher, conductor and scholar, setting a tradition of high standards, inspiring generations of students and colleagues," said Robert Commanday, longtime music and dance critic for the San Francisco Chronicle and founding editor of "San Francisco Classical Voice."

Drawn to Berlioz from his earliest college days, in part because the 19th-century composer's life and works were still relatively unexplored at the time, Holoman has established himself as one of the world's preeminent Berlioz authorities.

In 1983, Holoman was called to Geneva, Switzerland, to authenticate a newly uncovered manuscript attributed to the French composer. After establishing that the manuscript was indeed an 1830 Berlioz score, Holoman prepared the piece in modern notation and on March 3, 1985, led the UC Davis Symphony Orchestra in the first performance of the work.

In 2000, Holoman was invited to help plan and program France's observance of the 2003 bicentenary of Berlioz's birth, as a member of an international commission sponsored by the Orchestre de Paris and the Bibliotheque Nationale/Bibliotheque de France. In June 2003, Holoman led the UC Davis Symphony Orchestra on a Berlioz bicentennial tour to France.

The Francophile conductor has also fostered new American composers, notably UC Davis music department alumnus Steven Mackey, now a professor of music at Princeton, who premiered his piece, "The Big Bang and Beyond," with the orchestra in 1986. Holoman has arranged as well for the symphony to work with such established modern artists and professional arts organizations as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, pianist Leon Fleisher, the Martha Graham Dance Company and the San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows.

Holoman was awarded the UC Davis Distinguished Teaching Award in 1986 and the UC Davis Prize for Undergraduate Teaching and Scholarly Achievement in 1995. In 2000, he became the Barbara K. Jackson Professor of Orchestral Conducting.

In addition to his scholarship, teaching and conducting, Holoman was instrumental in planning and fundraising for the \$57 million, 1,800-seat Mondavi Center. The UC Davis Symphony Orchestra was the first to perform in the center, which opened in 2002 as one of Northern California's premier performance venues, and has called it home ever since.

Beyond the campus, Holoman has served as chief program annotator for the Sacramento Symphony Orchestra and as adviser, program annotator and broadcast commentator for the Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Pittsburgh symphony orchestras and the San Francisco Opera.

His program notes for the Sacramento Symphony grew into a book, "Evenings With the Orchestra: a Norton Guide for Concert-Goers," which became a 1992 Book of the Month Club alternate selection. He also authored "Masterworks: A Musical Discovery," a multimedia course of study consisting of a 400-page book, score anthology and computer program that includes auto-tutorials in the rudiments of music, self-paced interactive listening and a computerized quiz bank.

For audio and video recordings of Holoman's concerts and a symphony

50th-anniversary photograph album and slideshow, visit
<http://ucdso.ucdavis.edu>.

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