

## EXALTATION -- concert review

by Baruch Cohon

Subtitled "Biblical Stories Through Music," the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony presented a program at the Ford Amphitheater on August 14th that featured a spectrum of musical experiences inspired by the Bible -- and also featured some outstanding talent.

Founder-conductor Dr. Noreen Green piloted her orchestra through polished renditions of a variety of musical styles from classical through cinematic with a good portion of musical theater. Her ensemble included Concertmaster Mark Kashper, cello principal Barry Gold who soloed with great skill and feeling, and trumpeter Hagai Israeli who sounded a welcome and surprising shofar. As Noreen Green told the audience, "you know how hard it is to find a shofar in the right key?" For this concert, some ram really cooperated.

Gold's solo was featured in the opening number, Franz Waxman's "Ruth: a symphonic suite." Originally part of his score for the 1960 feature film "The Story of Ruth," this suite was requested by famed cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, unfinished at the time of Waxman's death, and later completed by Angela Morley. Gold and the orchestra deftly communicated the spirit of Ruth's vow "where you go I will go," setting the classical tone for the first half of the program.

A minor irritation came from the Ford Amphitheater staging which had the entire wind and brass section elevated, so that from the audience's view they and their instruments were largely hidden behind their music stands. Only when Hagai Israeli stood up to blow his shofar could we tell who was playing and what they were playing.

In the second half of the concert, of course, that hardly mattered. This was fun and games, from Ernest Gold's "Exodus" to a "Prince of Egypt" medley, all featuring guest vocalist Amick Byram, whose fine Broadway voice is heard on stage and on sound tracks for motion pictures and TV. Again, the LAJS provided expert backing. Byram's finale, "You'll Never Be the Same" which he co-wrote with Mark Dreistadt in celebration of Israel, was

outstanding, and the encore "Masada" was electrifying.

Hands-down hit of the evening was the young violinist Stephen Waarts, who soloed in "The Prophets," Violin Concerto No. 2, Opus 66 by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. This tall thin phenom, still in his 15th year, delivered a masterful performance of a complex and demanding work. The three movements interpret Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elijah respectively. This reviewer had the privilege of taking a few lessons from Tedesco myself back in the '60's, so I can testify to what a profound musician he was. I believe he would have been overjoyed to hear what Stephen Waartz and the LAJS did with his concerto, how they communicated the love of Isaiah, the doom in Jeremiah and the powerful promise of Elijah. With his first sonorous notes, Stephen Waartz grabbed our respect. Then came the challenging virtuoso runs and harmonics, the impeccable cues, and -- what impressed both the laymen and musicians in the audience -- the feat of memory to make this entire score his own. This young violinist, a student of the great Izhak Perlman, should have a stellar future to look forward to.

Altogether, "another academy award" for the L.A. Jewish Symphony.

Previous concerts, and no doubt future ones too, might feature more of what we usually identify as a "Jewish sound," but this one certainly spread a panorama of music inspired by the Jewish experience.