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Wielding the Baton: Interview with a Philharmonic Executive

Gina Cariño



Arvind (far right) and his team during the building of the WDCH.

Meet Arvind Manocha. Born in Ohio 36 years ago, he is Chief Operating Officer of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and General Manager of the Hollywood Bowl.

GC: Arvind, tell me about the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

AM: The LA Phil Association is made up of many things. On one hand the classical-music orchestra. On the other hand the Association has a very large non-classical music program and runs two of America's major performing-arts facilities, the Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Hollywood Bowl.

GC: And what exactly is your job?

AM: As COO of the LA Phil Association, I work with the CEO in developing overall strategy for the company and overseeing all operational issues. In addition, I am directly responsible for the management of all non-classical presentations at both venues. Finally, I am responsible for overall management of the Hollywood Bowl.

GC: You hold office in Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall. What was your role in the building of the WDCH?

AM: I was in charge of all strategic planning for the new concert hall; that is, answering the question: "how can the Philharmonic maximize the opportunities afforded to it by this new building?" So I worked with the team to look at new program offerings, new pricing strategies, PR and marketing, etc. I also acted as liaison between the Philharmonic, Gehry's office, and the builders.

GC: Has it had a "Bilbao Effect" on downtown LA?

AM: I think so. Since it opened, downtown LA has been enriched by major new buildings, including Rafael Moneo's cathedral, and thousands of new residences.

GC: A philharmonic company is primarily mandated to present works of classical music. Why do there have to be jazz, world music, pop-rock, even electronica concerts at WDCH?

AM: When we received the gift of this building, we knew we had a responsibility to make the Concert Hall relevant for all of Los Angeles. We present over 100 classical concerts a year. Why not use some of the other nights to speak to different audiences? These days, with iPods and their ability to "shuffle," barriers between musical types are coming down. We decided to reflect that in our programming philosophy.

GC: You have control over programming of non-classical events at WDCH, and over all programming at the Bowl.

AM: Well, I also report to the CEO and a Board of Directors, and I am accountable for the "why" of any program, so it's not like I can just implement vanity projects and schedule my favourite band just because.

GC: What did you have to do with Rufus Wainwright headlining the anniversary of July Garland's legendary night at the Bowl?

AM: Rufus had done the same at Carnegie Hall and it was a big success, so we asked him to repeat Judy Garland's Bowl show in the same fashion. He really wanted to do it as Judy's appearance at the Bowl was legendary and iconic. He did a great job!

GC: What music do you like?

AM: It sounds like a cliché, but I really do love a lot of different groups and styles of music. It depends on my mood. I have weeks where I am very into a particular band. In terms of older bands, I find myself going back to classics like the Rolling Stones and Cheap Trick. I love the Human League and feel they don't get enough credit for what they did. I loved bands like Suede and Pulp in the 90s. Of course newer groups like the Arcade Fire and the Killers are a lot of fun and mix old and new very creatively. Oh and Duran Duran, one can't forget Duran Duran.

GC: What percentage of the concerts you attend on the job would you really go to if you didn't have to?

AM: The nature of my job means I go to a lot of concerts and some nights I don't feel like going, but it's not because I don't like the artist or the program, it's more that I'm just tired. There are very few concerts that I'd say I don't want to go to.

GC: What studies are necessary to do what you do?

AM: None in particular, just good common sense. I studied English literature. I was lucky to not really follow any particular path but still end up doing something I really enjoy.