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# WARNER BROS. PRESENTS **BUGS BUNNY** *at the Symphony*

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 7, 2023**

2:00PM JUST ADDED - BEST AVAILABILITY!  
7:30PM LIMITED AVAILABILITY

PERFORMANCES AT THE SMITH CENTER



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## NOTES FROM THE STAGE FOR LAS VEGAS PHILHARMONIC by George Daugherty



Created & Produced by George Daugherty and David Ka Lik Wong

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**“SEINFELD”. Season 4, Episode 9: “THE OPERA”**

**EXTERIOR. OPERA HOUSE. NEW YORK CITY.**

**Jerry and Elaine wait outside the opera house, as last-minute patrons rush in to the performance.**

**ELAINE:** Jerry, we’re going to miss the overture!

**JERRY (Singing):** *“Overture, curtain lights! This is it, we’ll hit the heights. And oh what heights we’ll hit! On with the show, this is it!”*

**ELAINE (after a pause):** You know, Jerry, it is so sad. All your knowledge of high culture comes from *Bugs Bunny* cartoons.

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Jerry was not alone. In fact, there’s an old joke that if you stand on a street corner and sing the first few bars of Wagner’s *“The Ride of The Valkyries”* to passersby, 90% of the world will find the mantra *“Kill da wabbit”* uncontrollably popping into their heads.

The association of *Looney Tunes* and Wagner – and Rossini, Liszt, J. Strauss, *von Suppé*, Smetana, Tchaikovsky, Ponchielli, Donizetti, and any other number of golden age composers – is an indelible one. And it’s no accident. Because hundreds of millions of people, in America and the world over, first experienced classical music and opera at the hands of *Bugs Bunny*, *Daffy Duck*, *Elmer Fudd*, and the rest of the *Looney Tunes* ensemble, cavorting to the masterful classically-infused cartoon scores of Carl Stalling and Milt Franklyn.

For Stalling and Franklyn, the cartoons may have been hilarious, but the music was no laughing matter. They arduously and passionately worked with the same glorious Warner Bros. Studio Orchestra – and within the same studio music hierarchy – as did the more famous (and better paid) WB feature film composers of the day – Max Steiner, Erich Korngold, Bernard Herrmann, and others. But even though their animated shorts were only seven minutes long (instead of a feature’s two or three hours) and starred *Bugs Bunny* (instead of Bogart or Bette or Bacall), Stalling and Franklyn composed with a compositional magic that was irresistible to

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audiences of the 1930's, 40's, and 50's – and still is today. They established an unmistakably distinct “*Looney Tunes* sound” – and although movie fans might not have been able to define it, they instantly knew it (and loved it) when they heard it.

Born in 1891 in Lexington, Missouri, Carl Stalling was a piano prodigy at age 6, and he cut his musical teeth on that new invention known as “the moving pictures.” He was composing music for the movies before the movies actually even HAD music – or, at least, on actual soundtracks. By the age of 12, he was the principal theater pianist of his hometown’s little silent movie house, improvising scores day after day to the flickering black and white image on the silver screen. By his early twenties, he moved to the big city, where his improvised film scores became much more complex thanks to the grand theater organs found in Kansas City’s and St. Louis’ elaborate new movie palaces. He expanded his talents to composing and conducting for an actual theater orchestra at Kansas City’s Isis Theatre,

In a twist of fate that would change the direction of the rest of his life, Stalling made friends with a young, unknown Kansas City animator – a penniless guy named Walt Disney – and discovered the world of animation. Stalling and Disney ended up in Hollywood, and after two years of working with Disney (as well as with the innovative Ub Iwerks) young Carl Stalling moved over to Warner Bros., where he would spend his entire career.

Milt Franklyn was, at first, Stalling’s arranger and orchestrator at Warner Bros., but later took on more and more compositional duties, and upon Stalling’s retirement in 1958, Franklyn assumed the mantle of *Looney Tunes* composer himself. Together, the two of them – working under visionary animation directors like Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Tex Avery, and Bob Clampett, composed scores that were every bit as evocative as the cartoons they accompanied.

*Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies* were always populated with hit songs of the day – that was by design, in order to push the vast Warner Bros. song catalog to audiences and sheet music buyers, a sort of 1940’s YouTube. But it was Stalling’s and Franklyn’s pure orchestral scores that truly dazzled. A *Road Runner* cartoon would almost become a ballet, full of orchestral sound and fury that would inevitably cascade (and decrescendo) down to the whisper of an alto flute’s tri-tone as *Wile E. Coyote* almost silently hit the bottom of yet another Painted Desert crevasse, way below. “*The Rabbit of Seville*” was composed completely in the style and orchestral fabric of Rossini himself, while the gigantic “*What’s Opera, Doc?*”, with a full-bore Wagnerian-sized instrumentation, combined not only the major leitmotifs of all four *Ring Cycle* operas, but of “*Tannhauser*,” “*Lohengrin*,” “*The Flying Dutchman*,” and “*Rienzi*” as well. Eight Wagner operas in 6 minutes and 48 seconds. (And there are those who think this is truly the way to experience them!)

So, in reality, it is no surprise to find the genius of Carl Stalling and Milt Franklyn making a debut in the entertainment capital of the world – Las Vegas – with the magnificent Las Vegas Philharmonic, because these



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two composers have earned their moment in the limelight, and their place upon the magnificent concert platform of the breathtaking Smith Center.

And when it comes to our star – *Bugs Bunny* himself – well let’s just say that this Wascally Wabbit, with an iconic 80-year career behind him and still one of the most beloved “movie stars” in the firmament, will hold his own against previous Las Vegas superstars – including Elvis!!

When my partner-in-crime (and co-creator) David Wong and I concocted these concerts – first “*Bugs Bunny On Broadway*” in 1990, followed by new versions of “*Bugs Bunny at the Symphony*” in 2010, 2013, and 2019 – we had no idea that they (and we) would tour almost continuously for 33 years, playing to millions of concertgoers worldwide, and (for us) with a breathtaking array of world class symphony orchestras in venues ranging from the Hollywood Bowl to the Sydney Opera House . . . to The New York Philharmonic and The Boston Pops and 250 other major international orchestras – and now, Las Vegas! We thought our debut 1990 sold-out run at The Gershwin Theatre on Broadway was a fluke that would not be replicated anywhere else. We were wrong.

I guess we should not have been surprised, because the classic *Looney Tunes* projected in the concert, up on the big screen above the orchestra, are indeed brilliant. But more importantly, so is the music. Audiences everywhere love the scores of Carl Stalling and Milt Franklyn. Orchestral musicians love playing them too. Stalling and Franklyn were the real deal. Although they oftentimes took their musical cues from European composers, their mini-masterpieces were (and still are) quintessentially American. Brash, fresh, exciting, fantastically bombastic, in your face. Perfect accompaniment for *Bugs Bunny* and his friends. And I am so energized and excited to have the opportunity to guest conduct the extraordinary Las Vegas Philharmonic in this roller coaster ride of a concert. Thank you, Donato Cabrera, for letting me take your marvelous orchestra for a spin. When one is in Las Vegas, you always want somebody to loan you their Ferrari for a day and a night. This is the musical equivalent!!

And coming back full circle . . . maybe Elaine really had it wrong. Perhaps it’s not such a bad thing that so many of us first experienced classical music (and high art) from *Bugs Bunny* cartoons. Because for millions, the music of the *Looney Tunes* is also the music of our youth . . . our childhood . . . and in so many ways, the music of our imaginations. This music, as played by the Las Vegas Philharmonic, will be like a time machine, and will whisk you back to those unforgettable days when you sat on your living room floor, in your footy pajamas, eating sugary cereal, and watching *Bugs Bunny* and his friends. What none of us knew, back in those days, was that we were also getting a first class masterclass in spectacular classical music!