

It may be a way to draw young audiences to classical music

By Stuart Derdeyn, The Province



The VSO is teaming with Arnie Roth to perform music from the video-game franchise Final Fantasy. Photograph by: Handout, The Province

In concert

VSO Presents Distant Worlds: Music From Final Fantasy

Where: Orpheum Theatre, corner of Seymour and Smythe streets

When: Tonight at 8

Tickets: SOLD OUT

The name Nobuo Uematsu may not be as famous as that of Bach or Brahms. But for fans of the smash-hit Final Fantasy video games, he is as revered.

The Japanese composer is the man behind the franchise's award-winning soundtracks and was named an innovator in a Time magazine feature titled "Top 100: The Next Wave -- music."

Violinist, producer and composer Arnie Roth, meanwhile, won a Grammy with his longtime new-age group Mannheim Steamroller.

He has also performed with Il Divo, Diana Ross, Jewel and Josh Groban, as well as conducted many of the leading symphony orchestras.

Now, the two titans in their fields finally meet, in the Square Enix production of Distant Worlds: Music From Final Fantasy.

Roth will conduct the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in a program that will feature the North American premiere of the "Final Fantasy VII Main Theme."

Trust me, if you're into this stuff, that is huge news. As big -- or bigger than -- Roth's work on the 10-part RTE TV series on the Irish Tenors. Or even his work as producer, composer, conductor and arranger for the Barbie Princess CGI animated films (one of these won the musician a best score award at the 2003 DVD Premier Awards and his original song "Shine" from the Barbie as Rapunzel movie was nominated for a 2007 Emmy award).

"I don't think any of us expect video games or such to become the mainstay of symphony orchestras any time soon," says Roth.

"But, let's be honest, orchestras everywhere are behind the eight ball when it comes to seeking ways of bringing in young audiences and, belatedly, are really embracing the full scope of what that can be."

"They have always been able to pack a place with a Tony Bennett or a Johnny Mathis pops concert, but did those people ever come back the next week for Shostakovich?"

Roth believes the way to take that next step lies in productions such as the Music From Final Fantasy because, for all of the video screen segments playing out behind the orchestra or additional light shows that often accompany this sort of performance, these devoted fans are there for the music.

Roth credits Uematsu's compositional chops for the real success of this production.