

# **DAVID BENOIT:**

## **Pianist, Composer and Conductor**

Over the last quarter century, composer and pianist David Benoit (b. 1953) has been a passionate musical innovator committed to the exploration of many different art forms on the American landscape.

A five time Grammy nominee for his extraordinary and seminal contributions to contemporary jazz, Benoit has also embarked on a multi-faceted journey into the classical music world. This has led to guest pianist and conductor spots with numerous top symphonies and philharmonics, four performances at Carnegie Hall (including one with Maestro Leonard Bernstein), a performance on the steps of the Capitol Building with the National Symphony for the annual PBS July 4<sup>th</sup> event, and the creation of *Kobe*, a symphonic tone poem about a little girl growing up in postwar Japan.

This piece received its world debut with the Philippine Philharmonic in 2001 and will be performed in 2003 with Kent Nagano conducting the Berkeley Symphony. Benoit also recently completed his first year as Music Director of the Asia America Symphony. His first piano concerto, *The Centaur and the Sphinx*, will be completed next summer.

The remarkably versatile Benoit has lent his conducting talents and legendary piano performance skills to a wide variety of settings. As a conductor, he has performed the music of Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Igor Stravinsky, Camille Saint Saens, Mozart, Francis Poulenc and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. He has given piano performances for Claude Bolling's *Suite For Flute and Jazz Piano*, *Suite for Cello and Piano*, and is scheduled to perform a suite for guitar and piano with Angel Romero at the Los Angeles Philharmonic's annual fundraising concert. He has performed *The Peanuts Piano Concerto* with several orchestras as part of his tribute to Charles Schulz and the music of Vince Guaraldi, in conjunction with his 2000 GRP tribute recording *Here's To You, Charlie Brown: 50 Great Years*. He is also slated to perform as a guest soloist with Lalo Schifrin and his orchestra.

Combining his virtuosity on the piano with his conducting, Benoit has led concerts with numerous world class orchestras and symphonies: The Los Angeles Philharmonic, The San Francisco Symphony, The Atlanta Symphony, The Dresden Philharmonic, The Philippine Philharmonic, The Toledo Symphony, The New World Orchestra, The San Antonio Symphony, The San Jose Symphony, The Henry Mancini Institute Orchestra, The UC Santa Barbara Orchestra and The National Symphony Orchestra.

His involvement as a guest educator with the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation has taken him to classrooms throughout the country, where he has devoted many hours to teaching

children about music; in 2001, he won the foundation's coveted "excellence in music education" award. He has also been involved with the Grammy in the Schools Foundation and was voted Music Mentor of the Year by the International Foundation of Education and Performing Arts (IFEPA). Benoit is currently Music Director and Founder for the Asia America Youth Honor Orchestra, a collection of young musicians ranging from 11 to 18 years of age.

Combining his love of many different styles of music with his immense growth as a top orchestrator, Benoit has been a popular film and television composer. His most notable film scores are *The Stars Fell on Henrietta*, produced by Clint Eastwood and starring Robert Duvall; and *The Christmas Tree*, produced by Sally Field, voted Best Score of 1996 by Film Score Magazine. His long association with Charles Schulz and the famed Peanuts realm led to over ten years of composing music for Peanuts TV specials on CBS. In addition, he has written the themes for the long running soap opera *All My Children* (ABC), *Sisters* (NBC) and scored the movies of the week *Final Descent* (with the late Robert Urich) and *Cadillac Jack* (starring Clint Black). In addition to his film and television work, Benoit is nearing completion of his first Broadway musical, *Something's Got to Give*, in collaboration with lyricist Mark Winkler, about the life and times of Marilyn Monroe.

His career as a contemporary jazz pianist began in 1977 and includes 23 solo recordings over the past 25 years. Many of these, including his 1987 GRP Records debut *Freedom At Midnight* and its Grammy nominated 1988 follow-up *Every Step Of The Way*, are considered influential classics in the genre, which came to be known as Smooth Jazz. Among his other Grammy nominations are those for Best Instrumental Composition (for "Dad's Room," from 1999's *Professional Dreamer*) and Best Large Jazz Ensemble Performance (for the *GRP All-Star Big Band*). Combining two of the musical loves of his life, he recorded 1996's *American Landscape* with The London Symphony Orchestra. He was voted Keyboardist of the Year for 2000 and 2001 by the Oasis Smooth Jazz Awards, and is currently in the Top Ten on Billboard's Contemporary Jazz Chart with *Fuzzy Logic*, which spawned the recent #1 hit instrumental single "Snap!"

Benoit has arranged, conducted and performed music for many popular pop and jazz artists over the years, including Russ Freeman and the Rippingtons (he was involved with the band in its formative stages), Kenny Loggins, Patti Austin, Dave Koz, Kenny Rankin, Faith Hill, David Lanz, Cece Winans, David Pack, David Sanborn, The Walt Disney Organization and Brian McKnight. He also paid homage to one of his chief influences, Leonard Bernstein, by playing, arranging and performing on *The Songs of West Side Story*, an all-star project produced by David Pack, which achieved gold sales status.

Born in Bakersfield, California, Benoit grew up in The South Bay of Los Angeles. He studied piano at age 13 with Marya Cressy Wright and continued his training with Abraham Fraser, who was the pianist for Arturo Toscaninni. He focused on theory and composition at El Camino College, studying orchestration with Donald Nelligan, and later took film scoring classes taught by Donald Ray at UCLA. His education in music conducting began with Heiichiro Ohyama, assistant conductor of the L.A. Philharmonic,

and continued with Jan Robertson, head of the conducting department at UCLA. He is currently studying conducting with Jeffrey Schindler, Music Director for the UC Santa Barbara symphony orchestra.

He began his career as a Musical Director and conductor for diva Lainie Kazan in 1976 before moving on to similar roles with singer/actresses Ann Margaret and Connie Stevens.

Benoit has performed at The White House for three U.S. Presidents: Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan and George Bush, Sr. Other dignitaries he performed for include Colin Powell, Hillary Clinton, Al Gore, the late Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, current Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn and Senator Dick Durbin.

He and his wife Kei are the parents of an adopted daughter, June Koko, and reside in Palos Verdes, California.

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