



EUGENE ART TALK

BY BOB KEEFER

FRANCESCO LECCE-CHONG

NEW SYMPHONY CONDUCTOR NAMED

And Eugene loses a quiet arts leader

To absolutely no one's surprise, **Francesco Lecce-Chong** has been named the new music director of the Eugene Symphony. Wednesday's announcement

concludes the symphony's year-long search to find a conductor to replace Danail Rachev, who leaves his job as music director after the season wraps up with a final concert May 11.

National and even international attention has been focused on music director searches in Eugene lately because three of the last four people on the podium — Marin Alsop, Miguel Harth-Bedoya and Giancarlo Guerrero — have all gone on from their jobs here to national prominence.

After sorting through hundreds of résumés and performance videos, the symphony brought nine people to Eugene for interviews. That group was winnowed down to three finalists: Dina Gilbert, a Canadian who has served as assistant conductor at the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal; Ryan McAdams, a symphony and opera conductor who is former music director of the New York Youth Symphony; and Lecce-Chong, a Colorado native who is assistant conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. All three finalists came to town to conduct regular season concerts.

With its exquisite musicality, Lecce-Chong's March 16 performance left little doubt in anyone's mind who should take up the baton next fall, and I'm as enthusiastic as anyone about his selection.

Meanwhile, the symphony has announced its 2017-18 season, which opens with a special concert Sept. 19 with soprano

Renée Fleming. The regular season offers a new cello concerto, *Tales of Hemingway* by Michael Daugherty; a *Messiah* in December; and two works by Augusta Read Thomas, who will be in residence. See details at Eugene-Symphony.org.

Perhaps the biggest symphony news is this: After some years of consideration, the orchestra next season will join most of the rest of the local performing-arts community by moving the start time of its concerts from 8 pm to 7:30 pm.



The local art world suffered a huge loss Saturday with the death of Dick Easley, the founder and owner, with his wife, Asian art scholar Hue-Ping Lin, of the White Lotus Gallery, Eugene's most elegant art venue. He was 82.

Having met in Taiwan, the couple opened White Lotus in South Eugene in 1992, at first basing its offerings on Easley's large collection of modern Japa-

nese prints; they later moved the business downtown and expanded its range to include contemporary Chinese prints and paintings as well as work by contemporary Northwest artists.

"Dick Easley set the standard for galleries and art lovers in Eugene," Eugene art collector Roger Saydack said. "His love for art and artists, his impeccable taste, and his friendly and respectful manner helped make White Lotus a center of our cultural life."

A quiet, self-effacing man, Easley was a true *mensch*. Some fifteen years ago, when Karin Clarke decided to open her own gallery right across the street from White Lotus, Easley stepped up to help a competitor.

"Dick always gave me very smart and clear advice about running an art gallery, and I tried to listen," Clarke said. "The extraordinary quality and elegance of what they've been doing with the gallery has been something very unique to have in Eugene — not just the work, but the knowledge and passion they bring to it."

Easley had been battling cancer for some time but continued to work at the gallery as his health allowed. His death Saturday came after his hospitalization from a fall and a subsequent heart attack.

No memorial has been set.

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