



Saturday, October 04, 2008

PENDLETON

Season will mark finale for OES director

Kenneth Woods makes announcement to symphony board

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Oregon East Symphony conductor and music director Kenneth Woods
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Kenneth Woods will step down as the Oregon East Symphony's conductor and music director at the end of this season. Woods made his announcement at a board of directors meeting Thursday night.

Woods originally came to Eastern Oregon in 1999 as a professor of cello at Eastern Oregon University and music director of the Grande Ronde Symphony.

Woods was chosen to take over as music director and conductor of the Oregon East Symphony in 2000. He moved to Wales in 2003, but maintained his connection to the OES, commuting across the Atlantic for concerts and other events.

"It wasn't an easy decision to make or to announce," said Woods. "I've genuinely loved every concert and project we've done throughout these nine years, and I've made many lifelong friends here. But, moving ahead is important for all artists, and, much as I'll miss my friends in the orchestra and the community, it's time to move on to new projects and new challenges."

Woods has agreed to stay on as a musical advisor, to assist the OES board with the search for a new music director and to oversee programming and artistic planning until a new conductor is in place. He is also scheduled to conduct the first concert of next season.

"I'm pleased that Ken has made himself available in this capacity," says OES Executive Director Christina van der Kamp, "In addition to his talent as a conductor, he has always been a wonderful professional resource for the organization and has provided a valuable connection to the larger symphony music world."

During the early years of his tenure with OES, Woods re-energized local and regional audiences and players by improving artistic standards and active recruitment of soloists of international standard, said van der Kamp.

Woods also played a big role in the creation of the organization's preparatory orchestra, the A-Sharp Players, and the popular summer music camp.

Under Woods' direction, the orchestra presented world premieres of works by regional composers,

tackled some of the biggest works in the symphony repertoire, and hosted its first composer-in-residence in 2003. In 2005, he started a series of chamber music concerts and recitals in support of musician compensation.

In his final season with OES, Woods will direct the group in its fourth Mahler symphony in as many seasons and complete the orchestra's cycle of Beethoven's symphonies - both rare feats for a rural orchestra.

"Throughout my time here, this has been an orchestra of surprises, always making something special happen at every concert," said Woods. "But these last few years, when we discovered that not only could we play Mahler here, but do it rather well, are ones I'll always remember."

Once he moves on from Pendleton, Woods will continue his busy schedule of conducting orchestras across Britain and broadcast work with the BBC.

Woods recently signed a recording contract with Avie Records and will begin recording the first disk with the Northern Sinfonia next September. He will also continue to travel to Portland each summer to direct the Rose City International Conductors Workshop, which he founded in 2005.

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