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A Rhythm All His Own



Photos courtesy of Pacific Symphony

*He's more blue jeans and t-shirt than maestro tux and tails. He's got a rebel spirit that prompts him to fly planes, ride motorcycles, climb mountains, scuba dive, and even go to space one day. And he's part pyrotechnic. Who is this multitalented daredevil? None other than **Maxim Eshkenazy**, the 35-year-old Assistant Conductor of the Pacific Symphony Orchestra. Though he harbors deep connections to his native Bulgaria, his laid-back charm and self-effacing sense of humor are undeniably winning. Maxim gave bask a window into his world and spoke spiritedly of his Tchaikovsky Spectacular Summer Festival show in September, an event including thundering cannons and the OCFD on standby.*

Right off the bat, I'm struck by Maxim's Californication-star resemblance. "David Duchovny, you get that a lot?" I ask. "I do," he answers instantly, as though he's heard it a million times. "Bono, too," he adds, "but I don't really see that."

Appearances aside, we delve a little deeper into his unorthodox classical training. His interest in music started early, but the later experiences that led him to conducting are a little more unexpected.

"My father started me as a musician, a violinist when I was five. At that time, Bulgaria was a Communist country, so two things very much on the radar of those countries: sports and art. Early on, I would conduct my brother and cousins with a pencil."

However, Maxim challenged this seemingly destined path. "My life was predetermined with my parents," he explains. "There was this love/hate relationship I was experiencing with who I was. So I signed up to do a parachute jump with the Bulgarian army at 16, without my parents' permission. I woke up early, and snuck out. At that time, it was definitely a way to be myself."

continued



Maxim Eshkenazy frequently takes to the skies in this Cessna 172



“Being in the air and making music is really very similar... It’s that incredible openness.”

The army didn’t stick, but the freeform love of flying did. Today, he holds licenses for flying airplanes and helicopters, as well as paragliding and hang gliding.

“Being in the air and making music is really very similar,” he says. “It’s that incredible openness. You’re not constrained by concrete. You want to turn left, you turn left. You want to go fast, you go fast. With music, it’s the same. It’s almost [an] out of body experience.”

The inspiration for these musical flights of fancy? “I’m a big Mahler fan. I love Symphony No. 1, No. 2, adore No. 4. And I’m discovering a huge love for a contemporary composer called Osvaldo Golijov, fantastic music. And, of course, I adore Beethoven—the music is so energetic and incredible to conduct. Also, I enjoy more obscure pieces of Leonard Bernstein, who was one of Carl St. Clair’s mentors,” he says.

Speaking of St. Clair—the PSO Music Director for an unheard of 21 years—I ask point-blank: “Do you have your eye on that spot?” Laughing, but without missing a beat, he replies, “Uh, yes, I can’t wait to be Carl St. Clair. That’s a very direct and

beautiful question. Someday, yes. In the very distant future.”

Currently, Maxim is also the Music Director of PSO Youth Orchestra, an especial passion of his given his love of children. (Another interesting character quirk, as Maxim’s single and doesn’t have kids, though he wants many.) “I always want the Youth Orchestra to be part of my life. It’s an enormous pleasure to work with a young soul,” he says.

What else does the future hold for Maxim? On September 3rd, he will present his fireworks-focused PSO Summer Festival show, the Tchaikovsky Spectacular “1812 Overture,” at Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre. He says, “I love combining fireworks and orchestra. About 18 cannons are actually written in the score. So it’s not like you can shoot them anywhere you want. It’s very complicated, synchronized. They have to call the cannon shots two seconds ahead of time. It’s something I sweat overnight.”

Maxim, fireworks, cannons and the orchestra. An unconventional but winning combination that, somehow, melds together perfectly.



Welcome to bask Brief, the word on the street about the latest happenings, accomplishments and current statuses of well-known working professionals. *bask* Brief gives a global perspective that goes beyond our backyard and spotlights the new endeavors of a handful of movers and shakers who you may have wondered about. In this first *bask* Brief, we highlight **Tyra Banks** who is getting seriously schooled at an unexpected academy. You'll learn about the new pursuits of the often-outrageous newsman **Keith Olbermann**, whose boss is now Al Gore. And finally, we turn our attention to **Ben Affleck** and his main role these days as a world philanthropist.

Getting Schooled

If you heard Tyra Banks was going to Harvard, would you buy it? Neither did we, but fact is stranger than fiction: she is. From walking the catwalk to walking the campus of Cambridge, this model turned mogul is enrolled in Harvard's Owner/President Management Program—and she's one of only 18 women among her 180 classmates.

You've got to hand it to her for stepping out of the model prototype by actively working to grow her company to be the best. She could have just hired specialists, but she's smart enough to know you can't always bank on others. So Banks picked the number one business school in the world and will complete their three-part, nine-week program, which is spread out over three years.

Forbes estimated Banks made \$30 million in 2009, and once again she's proven she's not to be underestimated. Cambridge is a long way from South Central LA, where she was born. Out of high school, Banks chose the fashion runways of Paris instead of USC and UCLA, both of which she was accepted to. That gut instinct seemed to work well for her; chances are this will too.

His Current Home

What ever happened to news provocateur and Countdown king Keith Olbermann after his abrupt departure from MSNBC earlier this year? He's going global with his newscast on Current TV with "news produced independently of corporate interference," as Olbermann likes to say.

As many know, the outspoken anchor of liberal causes and Fox news critic shocked the news world with his surprise announcement in January that he was broadcasting his last show of Countdown. He continued to surprise many by announcing his fast, further left turn to the Current network.

Don't worry if you're not current on Current: you're not alone. The network, which started in 2005, is still finding its way. It's Al Gore's baby, who runs the network along with Joel Hyatt, co-founder and Executive Vice-Chairman. Olbermann, now Chief News Officer of Current Media, is once again hosting his one-hour controversial commentary weeknights at 8 pm—the same timeslot as his MSNBC show and where Fox News' Bill O'Reilly pulls in over 3 million viewers a night.

Current airs on cable and satellite in 75 million households worldwide, operating under the guiding philosophy to "shine a light where others won't dare and to boldly explore, open minds and spark conversations." So can Current compete? Will Olbermann's oversized personality be the lucky breaking news for the underdog network? You might want to tune in to see.

Good Will Ben

It seems Ben Affleck's second act is actor turned activist – and maybe that's not a bad thing considering Gigli and Jersey Girl. Affleck has made numerous trips to countries on the African continent to understand the causes and consequences of conflict there and has founded the Eastern Congo Initiative. He's also joined forces with Cindy McCain (both of whom recently testified before the U.S. Congress) to urge the United States to appoint a special envoy for the Democratic Republic of Congo and to make sure that elections scheduled there in November are free and fair. And when he's not off to Washington to stand up for Congo, he's a philanthropist for Feeding America, which is committed to the 49 million Americans who struggle with hunger. Are Affleck's good will ways part of a plan to win back Hollywood's affection after falling out of favor due to his overblown personal life? That remains to be seen, but we hope he will stay true to his new passions if his career does rebound.