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CONTACT: Meagan Iverson
541-593-1084
meagan@sunrivermusic.org



GET TO KNOW YOUR FESTIVAL **INTRODUCING MAESTRO KELLY KUO**

SUNRIVER, ORE – (This is one of a series of previews of the upcoming 44th Season of the Sunriver Music Festival).



Being a child piano prodigy in a small rural community isn't easy. Becoming a respected conductor of both opera and classical music is even harder. But that is the fascinating musical journey that brings Kelly Kuo, a finalist for the Festival's Artistic Director, to Central Oregon to conduct summer concerts in 2021.

The current Artistic Director of the Oregon Mozart Players, Kelly Kuo brings musical versatility including work on over 90 operas plus an expansive symphonic repertoire. In 2008, Maestro Kuo

became the first conductor of Asian descent to lead a performance at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, making his company debut with Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Kuo continues to concertize as the only pianist to have studied with two pupils of Russian virtuoso Vladimir Horowitz.

"It's unusual to be a hybrid conductor handling both opera and symphonic assignments," explains Kuo. "Although many old school conductors started in opera, today it can be difficult to make this transition."

Making difficult transitions is nothing new for Kuo. At the age of four, he and his parents were visiting a department store and he spied a piano and just started playing. That prompted them to have Kelly take piano lessons. There was only one problem. In the small town of Hermiston, Oregon the best piano teacher thought he was too young and suggested he first start violin lessons with her son. So, Kelly transitioned to the violin. But not long after musical talent was recognized, piano lessons commenced, and both he and his brother became accomplished and well-

known pianists. After his violin teacher moved on to college, he switched to the clarinet and joined the band. Hermiston's renowned high school band program, third in the state at the time, included 225 young musicians out of 1,000 students.

"There were only two band directors in Hermiston, one for the high school and one for middle school. No matter what instrument, they basically taught 95% of us to play. They were fantastic teachers. Hermiston probably had more musicians per capita than any other town in Oregon," adds Kuo.

Heading for college, Kuo made another transition. "I wasn't planning on majoring in music, but the University of Oregon offered me a scholarship, so I passed on becoming an aerospace engineer." Kuo quickly discovered that his idea of a dual major in Physics and Music was not very practical. He decided to concentrate on becoming a professional pianist.

Today, Kuo's flexibility and collaborative spirit are at the heart of his approach to conducting. "Building trust with the orchestra is critical. Having worked with opera singers for years and playing piano professionally, I believe I earn trust pretty quickly."

Audiences have long appreciated Kuo's flexible approach to the podium. "I try to analyze what I have to do to inspire musicians and performers to deliver their best – to bring their A-game. This makes the audience the real winner."

Maestro Kelly Kuo is one of two finalists who will be conducting during Sunriver Music Festival's 44th season in August 2021. Maestro Brett Mitchell is the other Artistic Director finalist. Kuo's and Mitchell's arrival next August is the culmination of a year-long Maestro search by the Festival Board and search committee.

"Next summer our members and community receive the unique opportunity to see two outstanding professionals in action as they lead our talented Festival Orchestra," states Executive Director Meagan Iverson. Visit www.sunrivermusic.org for a sneak peek of the complete Summer Festival schedule and for profiles of both finalists.

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