

# GENTRY

PENINSULA FEBRUARY



IN SAN FRANCISCO

## Symphony at Your Service

### Concert Concierge Jennifer Massoni reports.

For some of us, it's the opera, and for others, the ballet. For others still, it's the symphony—that performance that most stirs our soul or sends our imaginations to a far-off land. For those of us who know well and love the San Francisco Symphony, and for those of us who might want to test the classical waters, a new web-based service from the San Francisco Symphony will answer all our questions.

Concert Concierge is a tool designed specifically for audience members and the first online service of its kind launched by an orchestra.

The chart of concerts can be overwhelming, and many of our artists come from around the globe. A lot of people tend to freeze because they're just not sure what to pick."

Helping you pick is exactly why Concert Concierge is there—the step-

by-step service literally walks you through the process as you select your mood preferences (from the light and pleasant to the dramatic and edgy), a performer (from a violin to a vocal solo), a time period (from Baroque to contemporary), a calendar date, and, finally, how

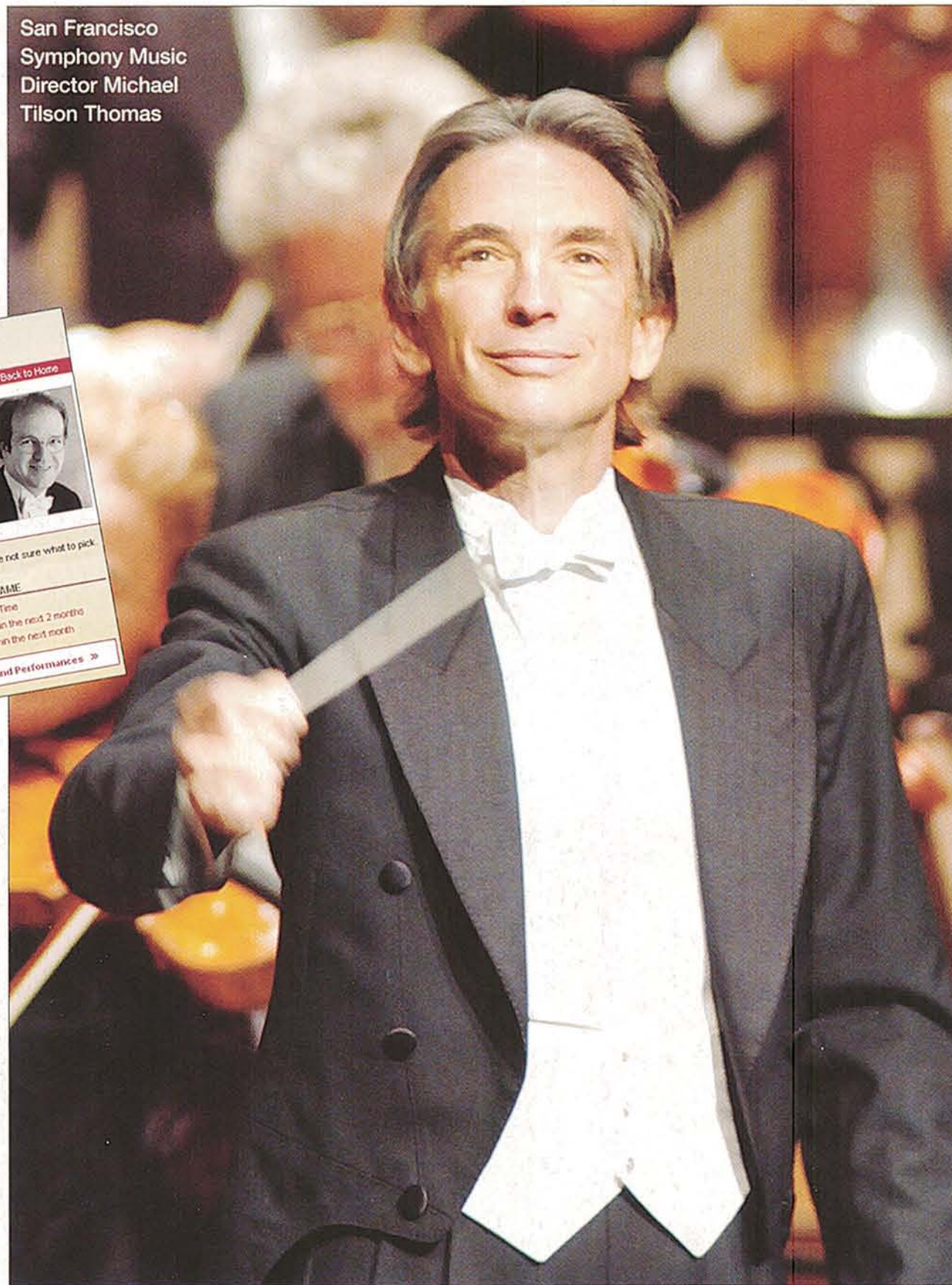
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to purchase tickets. You can also peruse staff recommendations and access a handy First-Timers Guide, neighborhood restaurant suggestions, and driving directions to Davies Symphony Hall. This month, with Valentine's Day on all of our minds, Acting Director of Public Relations Oliver Theil says, "Let's say you're in Concert Concierge looking for a concert to give as a Valentine's Day gift and you know your partner is interested in piano and the Romantic period. Alan Gilbert, who conducts a Schuman concerto for a piano solo from the Romantic period, is a perfect example of what you'll find."

Prisk admits that an exciting benefit of Concert Concierge is the brand new audience members the service is attracting. "What we have found is that 49 percent of people who purchased tickets are either brand new to San Francisco Symphony or come only one or two times a year. The ease of use gave them confidence to go ahead and make the purchase," says Prisk. "We're trying to give people the tools to have a good first experience as a whole. Once they are here, the concert will take

care of itself." After all, enjoying the symphony is about much more than the composer of the program—it's about creating an ambiance for the evening.

"Overall, what we're trying to do is simplify what is a complex decision for people unfamiliar with our art form," Prisk says of the SFS's goal of making the musical performance as accessible and innovative as possible. A second program launched this year, the Friday 6.5 Series, also intends to attract a broader audience. The six concerts in the series all begin at 6:30 PM rather than the traditional 8 PM, appealing to people just getting off of work or who may already be in the city. A new format also offers a reduced number of works, which allows each to be introduced by the conductor. "It's so thrilling to be here in the Hall and see the ovation that it got," Prisk says of witnessing the first Friday 6.5 concert last November. "And Alan Gilbert is also leading one of the innovative Friday 6.5 series concerts," Theil says, a reminder of a perfect way to spend Valentine's night. And, as transitions go, in the musical world or otherwise, that's just about pitch perfect. ■



San Francisco Symphony Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas



The Symphony's Marketing Director Michele Prisk first had the idea for the tool seven years ago. "I realized the technology had caught up and we were in a better position to invest in the feasibility of doing this," Prisk says of the official launch last August. And the public response has been nothing short of harmonious. "Our art form can be rather intimidating for people who don't have a classical music background," Prisk explains. "There are roughly 32 different programs every year.