



Ashu

March 17-19

Southern Arizona Symphony Orchestra

It's rare to have a classical concert with *sax appeal*, but that's exactly what SASO has programmed this month. For audiences, it will be a not-to-be-missed opportunity to hear an instrument that is closely associated with jazz and pop music performing works from the classical repertoire.

The soloist for the concert will be Ashu, a very engaging virtuoso player who is a man on a mission. "To me, the saxophone is an instrument that is perfectly suited for classical music," he observes. "It can play with the softest pianissimos, it can play with such emotional intensity, it can project in the largest halls, it has effortless technical facility, it has all these facets. It's such a versatile instrument. It can play in any genre and adapt to any style."

When it was created in 1840 by Adolphe Sax it was designed to be a concert instrument, but it simply has not been utilized much by any professional classical orchestra. However, when Ashu first encountered a sax at age 10 — hearing the golden tones spilling out of an alleyway in San Francisco — he knew that it was his destiny to make it sing the most gorgeous music he could find. "A couple of years after I started to play I came across a CD of the great Luciano Pavarotti. There was something about the emotional power

of his singing that had a profound effect on me. In that moment, I decided I wanted to find a way to make a solo classical career. Everyone said, 'It's never been done. You're crazy! You have to either change styles or just give it up.' But sometimes you have to ignore the naysayers, follow your heart and believe in yourself."

That persistence has resulted in him being the go-to guy for pieces like those he will be performing with SASO. The program will include Gabriel Fauré's beautiful and uplifting *Requiem*, and William

Walton's *Crown Imperial* march, which was first performed at the 1937 coronation of King George VI. Ashu will join in the eclectic selections with two tangos written by Astor Piazzolla, and arranged by the saxophonist. "He is one of my favorite composers," Ashu says. "If there's a composer whose music really moves me, but maybe he didn't write for the saxophone, I'll try reworking it."

The big work he will be performing is Alexander Glazunov's *Saxophone Concerto* (1934), the last piece that the Russian composer completed. "It's one of my absolute favorite pieces to perform," enthuses Ashu. "It's one of the really great masterpieces written for the saxophone. It's a very Romantic work, at times very full of melancholy, at other times optimistic and triumphant. It sort of takes you through the whole spectrum of emotions in 14 minutes."

Not surprisingly from someone who has followed his own muse, Ashu cites his influences as being a very diverse group of performers whose styles and sounds are uniquely their own. "My favorites are the ones who are able to infuse such a sense of who they are, their personalities, into their playing. People like Glenn Gould, Frank Sinatra or Vladimir Horowitz ... you listen to them and feel like you know them." **Fri: 7 pm. Valley Presbyterian Church, Green Valley; Sat: 7:30 pm. SaddleBrooke DesertView Performing Arts Center; Sun: 3 pm. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. 308-6226. www.sasomusic.org. www.ashuonline.com.**