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"Surf" — Swarmius takes Orchestra Nova to the Beach

[Dave Good](#), May 14, 2012

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Surf: A Double Concerto for Alto Saxophone, Violin, & Orchestra

May 12, Swarmius, with Orchestra Nova, Irwin M. Jacobs Qualcomm Hall (Five out of five stars)

"I wanted to see how things sounded under water."

This is how it starts for Joseph Waters. He gets curious about a sound, and then, about how he can use that sound in a recording project or a concert.

I'd first encountered the laptop artist/composer right after he moved to San Diego in 2002. He had a recording studio in his La Mesa home and on that day, wasps were flying about in it. A professor of Music and Director of Electro-Acoustic and Media Composition at SDSU, he'd released a jarful of the bugs in order to record them while they buzzed around a light bulb.

This time during the beginnings of the making of "Surf" Waters, 58, plunged a hydrophone into the sea.

"Surf" was commissioned by Orchestra Nova artistic director and conductor Jung-Ho Pak as part of a new concert series called *Nova Goes Green*. What Waters came back with was, as he described it, a classical-meets-rock-and-roll wild ride for orchestra and two soloists.

In this case the soloists were the violinist Lindsay Deutsch and a classically trained saxist named Todd Rewoldt who also figures in Waters's side project Swarmius.

The piece opened with Fear No Music and Swarmius member Joel Bluestone making tense with a slow building gong crescendo followed by orchestral madness — perfect! It was West Side Story drama meets Metallica and Stravinsky with the dual soloists throwing fireballs at each other while the old drum roll from the Surfaris' 1962 hit Wipeout riffed in the background.

It turns out that Surfari's co-founder Bob Berryhill was sitting right behind me in the Jacobs auditorium in Mira Mesa during night number two in the series of three concerts.

"I thought he did a fantastic job of trying to capture the world of surf." Berryhill lives in Laguna Beach with his wife. His hair and beard have gone white, but he still surfs. "It's hard to describe what it's like when you're out there on a board."

Does Joe Waters surf? No. But he told the sold-out theater that he'd "been dumped off a boogie board enough times to respect the power of the ocean." This is precisely what "Surf" conveyed: chaos, and ocean muscle.

I sat next to Judy and her husband Alex. First names only. "Wow. Wow. Wow," was all she said at the conclusion. And those were good wows, she said, not bad. She was a seasoned concert-goer, but then again she had likely never heard anything quite like this.

You don't go to Joe Waters expecting the usual. He once turned a foot bridge in Golden Hill into a giant xylophone and thinks it would be perfectly acceptable to put an audience into a swimming pool and have them breathe through hoses while he and Swarmius perform under water.

"It was just the most fun," Waters said backstage in the green room following the performance. "I've always wanted to do it, but working with an orchestra is so expensive." He thinks that, including rehearsals, the total cost to stage "Surf" may have approached \$50,000 dollars. Later, he would say this: "It's like painting with colors. I've never had a professional orchestra commission me to write a full piece."

The Nova series paired Beethoven's "Pastoral Symphony" with "The Lark Ascending," "Surf", and Steve Heitzeg's "Aqua", a tribute to Jacques Cousteau. Zuriel Waters, a Brooklyn artist, son of Joseph Waters created an original ocean/surf video which ran on a projection screen behind the orchestra in a live performance performed by Matthew Blessing who was reading the score and watching the conductor. A video program designed by Chris Warren allowed for real time cross fading so that the video kept pace with the performance.

I asked Todd Rewoldt about performing the thicket of 16th note runs written a full octave above the normal range of an alto sax that come at the conclusion of "Surf."

"It was borderline ridiculous," he laughed, meaning difficult. "At that point, you don't even know if you're playing it right." He thinks being an ex-skateboarder has helped his perspective. "The trick is don't over think it." He and Deutsch had only been given a month to practice their respective parts. Together, with full orchestra, they had but three rehearsals.

"Joe kept changing the ending. He and Jung Ho would talk, and then he'd work on it some more. He changed it like, I think, 100 times." Actually, it was more than that.

Waters: "I'm proud of "Surf," but it took over 200 rewrites before it finally passed muster with the conductor."

"Surf" premiered May 11 at the Coronado Performing Arts Center

2nd Photo: Ruth Edward Anderson



[Swarmius: it's a new day at the beach](#)



[Left to right: Joseph Waters, Jung-Ho Pak, Todd Rewoldt, Lindsay Deutsch, Joel Bluestone](#)

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