



The Delaware Symphony Orchestra recorded with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet at The Grand in May.

A maestro's time to shine

David Amado has a recording and a star rising

BY CHRISTOPHER YASIEJKO || PHOTOGRAPHS BY EMILY VARISCO

When David Amado, conductor of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra, completes a concert, he plays a game with colleagues who greet him backstage.

Amado, in his sixth year as music director, prides himself in his ability to gauge time. He has a calmness that belies his intensity, and together the qualities have helped him run an efficient operation during rehearsals – in which union agreements dictate how long musicians

can perform before taking a break – and during performances.

Backstage, after a performance, Amado likes to guess the time.

“Ten of seven,” he might say. He usually is right.

That attention to timing lubricated his latest project, a landmark recording for the orchestra with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. When the group first visited The Grand in 2006, they and Amado

developed a warm relationship.

They shared a work ethic, a love for classical music with Latin grooves and a passion for coffee.

That shared comfort led to the project, a recording for the Telarc International label, a leader in classical recordings.

During four days in mid-May, The Grand was host to two concerts and two recording sessions featuring Joaquin Rodrigo’s “Concierto Andaluz” and the premiere recording of Sergio Assad’s “Interchange,” written for the quartet. The two other pieces were Manuel de Falla’s “The Three-Cornered Hat” and Maurice Ravel’s “Bolero.”

Lucinda Williams, the symphony’s executive director, could tell by the questions the producer, Erica Brenner, was asking that doubts lingered about the efficiency of a regional orchestra whose musicians don’t perform together weekly.

Twenty minutes later, when the first session ended, Brenner turned to Williams, a smile having washed over her face.

“The misconception people have about conductors,” says Mark Mobley, the

symphony's director of community engagement, "is that the music is made by how he or she waves his or her arms in front of the orchestra. That's not it. It's the rehearsal time that really makes things happen. And he just happens to be very gifted at knowing how to do the maximum amount of work in the minimum amount of time.

"It just happens that his way of working translates extremely well to the recording process."

During concerts, Williams is backstage. She sees what the audience does not – the conductor's face. "It's usually very David – very intense, with moments of great joy," she says. "But with this, there was always a permanent sort of half-smile on his face. He just had this one dimple that kept going on."

Amado, whose ancestors were Spanish, especially loves Assad's Latin sounds. As the orchestra prepared with the quartet, Amado brought his own cajón, a boxy Afro-Peruvian percussion instrument, and the tambourine-like pandero.

As he conducted, he moved to the rhythm of Assad's Brazilian sounds.

"If you're not joyful when you do it, it doesn't work," Amado says. "There was something particularly joyful about these guys we were playing with.

"There's something very beautiful and very deep ... about [Brazilian] culture. People love people there. And they love life, and they love each other."

The connection he forged with the quartet, however, went beyond music.

In the afternoon before the Saturday concert, two members of the quartet visited his home in Greenville to chat over coffee. "We're a bunch of coffee geeks," Amado says.

The next stage?

Soon after Williams took over the symphony, she met with Amado. They talked about themselves, the orchestra and their way forward. A shared goal was to get a label and a recording.

Now that it's happened – the CD will be released in January amid much hoopla and another performance, though the details aren't yet available – Amado likely has moved closer to the next stage of his career, whenever and wherever that might be.

"He knows the difference it will make in his career," Williams says. "I think he knows that. But his focus was always the very best product. That was it."

Amado has conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra several times, and Williams says



David Amado with producer Erica Brenner, whom the orchestra worked with for its recording with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet.



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he is "on the radar screen of several other orchestras right now. It's a matter of when they have an availability and when they need him."

But Amado betrays nothing more than an absorbing devotion to the moment. He considers himself an architect whose job is to build each piece of music using the score as a blueprint.

Amado said there were no "images of

Grammy awards ... dancing through my head" during the recording with the quartet. "I was thinking about what I could do to help all of the musicians I was dealing with play their best."

Steve Zeisler, vice president of the DSO's board and co-chair of its artistic committee, says the project with the quartet worked well, in part, because of the orchestra's size.

For one, smaller orchestras are less expensive. "The way this whole thing came together," Zeisler says, "I don't think would've happened with a \$50 million orchestra. I don't think innovation occurs because you are big. ... It's about flexibility. It's about excellence. It's about collaboration. And it's about clicking with each other."

For all of the praise Amado's colleagues have heaped upon him, the conductor seems not to have lost his sense of humility.

"This album is not going to be 'David Amado and the Delaware Symphony with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet,'" he says. "It's going to be 'The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet with the Delaware Symphony and David Amado.' And I want them to feel great about that.

"I find it deeply satisfying that we were able to see this thing all the way through to the end, and that it started not from some executive machination. It started with people on the stage making really great music and getting along really well, and deciding it would be great to do this on a record. That, to me, is the most genuine, the most satisfying."