

DSO's Final Performance of Season Spotlights Mahler

By Christine Facciolo

For a work that for many years was regarded as the “ugly duckling” of Gustav Mahler’s nine completed symphonies, the Seventh is turning up with greater regularity just about everywhere in the classical world.

On Friday, May 18, night it was David Amado’s turn to lead the Delaware Symphony Orchestra (DSO) in its first-ever performance of this most enigmatic and fascinating work.

Amado prepped the audience in a pre-performance that pointed out the orchestral and rhythmic subtleties as well as the advanced harmonic language that presaged the Second Viennese School, making an indelible impression on a young Arnold Schoenberg.

The Mahler Seventh has always been considered a problem piece. Entire musicological conferences have been devoted to its analysis but agreement remains elusive.

Amado’s reading of the mercurial first movement, with its hauntingly beautiful tenor horn solos, offered a bit of everything: power, brilliance, mystery, even dreaminess. He was mindful of details — every instrumental solo stood out in relief — but he never lost track of the overall trajectory and architecture. Indeed, the performance was such that Mahler’s careening shifts in tonality and mood made perfect and logical sense, serving as a foundation for the “night” movements that followed.

Amado and the DSO were most impressive where Mahler is most impressive, that is, in the symphony’s three central movements. The second movement is a kind of nocturnal march, introduced by a call and response motif in the horns. Colorful elements such as cowbells and warbling woodwind bird calls instilled a pastoral atmosphere throughout. But not quite as the march theme remained eerily unsettled, vacillating between a major and minor key.

The second *Nachtmusic* was more successful at evoking an Alpine, folksy charm with a subtle but effective mandolin and guitar accompaniment.

The third movement *Scherzo* was downright strange with its mix of waltz tunes and *Ländler*. There seemed to be an oddity at every turn. One of the most striking gestures was a pizzicato in the cellos and basses, which were instructed by Mahler to pluck the string so hard that it rebounds against the fingerboard.

The performance concluded triumphant rendition of the complex *Rondo* finale. What in lesser hands would come across like a bizarre mash-up of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* and Lehar’s *The Merry Widow*, here exuded the feel of exuberant rejoicing. A guest appearance by *The Bells of Remembrance* aided in the joyful culmination of a tentative journey from dusk to dawn.

See www.delawaresymphony.org.

Posted by [Michelle Kramer-Fitzgerald](#)