

Crowd-pleasing 'Protest and Rebellion' opens Delaware Symphony Orchestra season

Gail Obenreder, Special to The News Journal

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(Photo: Courtesy of Joe del Tufo/Delaware Symphony Orchestra)

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It's not only at sporting events that you'll sing the national anthem. On Friday, 1,000 people at Wilmington's Grand lustily sang along in a tradition that marked the opening of the Delaware Symphony's 2017-18 season with a concert entitled "Protest and Rebellion."

Now in his 15th season as music director, David Amado opened with Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1, which the composer subtitled "Classical." And it's just that, referencing Haydn and Mozart (also on the program). Written in 1917, this 14-minute work explores classical form in a spritely, slightly distorted way that Amado called "spiked with 20th century wit."

The virtuoso composition challenges the orchestra with almost-perpetual motion, especially in the strings, along with moments of whimsy that were rendered with utmost musical care and a sense of lightness and grace. This is not what you expect when you think "20th century Russian," and Amado led the orchestra in a fleet and polished performance that had the audience smiling.

The evening continued with Mozart's seldom-performed Concerto for Flute and Harp. The composer's only work for the harp, it's not his most distinguished composition, but it is filled with orchestral charm, featuring extended duos for the two solo instruments.

Amado often highlights the fine DSO players, and here Kimberly Reighley (flute) and Sarah Fuller (harp) navigated Mozart's trills and runs with aplomb. The Maestro elicited a totally different orchestral tone in this piece, and the first half closed with enthusiastic accolades.

Beethoven's majestic Fifth Symphony, one of the classical canon's most iconic works, capped the evening. Addressing the audience, Amado noted that Beethoven strongly believed in the values of the French Revolution — liberty, equality and fraternity — and that fervent revolutionary voice was especially prominent in the third and fourth movements. Positioning it as the composer's ode to the "liberation of the individual," Amado brought single instruments to the forefront as they rose out of the massed ensemble.

The performance was exquisitely sculpted — clearly defined chords alternating with dramatic changes in tempo and volume — and was just as exquisitely realized by the orchestra. It's especially exciting to hear this work with a nimble ensemble instead of the huge forces sometimes brought to it, and the passion of the composer was matched by the passion of the DSO players.

The symphony has expanded its performance footprint this season, and the concert will be played downstate at Cape Henlopen High School on Sunday afternoon.

Gail Obenreder is an arts professional, writer and producer from Wilmington.

If you go

WHAT: Delaware Symphony — Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1 (Classical) and Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp (with Kimberly Reighley and Sara Fuller).

WHERE: Cape Henlopen High School Theatre, Lewes

WHEN: Sunday, Sept. 17, 3 p.m. Pre-concert remarks by David Amado at 2 p.m.

TICKETS: \$37, \$27, \$17; students, \$10.

FOR MORE INFO: delawaresymphony.org; (302) 656-7442