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Delaware's Music Man

The Delaware Symphony Orchestra thrives under the direction of one of the country's most talented young conductors. By **Cassandra M. Vanhooser**, photography **Scott Suchman**

As evening arrives in Wilmington, David Amado settles into a well-loved brown leather club chair in his spacious living room. Giggles from 4-year-old twins Alex and Renee float down the stairwell as their mother, Meredith, reads a bedtime story. David tenses as baby Elena stirs in her nearby carrier but relaxes again as she sighs in her sleep.

With all quiet on the home front, the conductor and music director of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra turns to one of his favorite subjects. "Pulled pork," he says with a smile. "That's my thing. I haven't cooked it on the Big Green Egg yet, but I will soon."

Notable Legacy His love of food, David admits, comes from his father's side of the family. His talent for classical music comes directly from his mother.

"My mother was a violinist, and her mother was a great violist," David says, describing his musical lineage. "She was the first to record all of the Bach cello suites on the viola. She was a wonderful teacher, someone who taught a lot of people who became prominent violists and musicians."

No doubt the young maestro measures up to the standards set by his family. As he enters his sixth season at the Delaware Symphony, the engaging musician is one of the most talked about conductors in the business today. Even now, as he traces his circuitous journey from pianist to maestro, David seems a bit surprised by the transformation. [➔ turn to page 4](#)

The conductor is no more important than any other member, says the Delaware Symphony Orchestra's David Amado. "We all have to be here."



A Life of Music By age 5 he was taking piano lessons, and by high school he had enrolled in a precollege music program at The Juilliard School in New York City. At his father's insistence, he went to the University of Pennsylvania for his freshman year.

After just one year, David transferred to Juilliard and spent the next three working on a bachelor's degree in piano performance. There he met Meredith, an accomplished violinist in her own right, and ultimately became captivated by orchestral music.

"I was always fascinated by this big ensemble of people who were doing something so foreign to me," David confesses. "As a pianist there's relatively little social music-making. You need a piece of equipment, and you need to practice. As a conductor, you need 80 people."

Delaware Bound David went on to earn a master's degree in conducting at Indiana University and then returned to Juilliard for three more years of study. After working in both Portland, Oregon, and St. Louis, he made the leap to Wilmington.

"We have this incredibly rich vein of talent that runs from New York to Washington, D.C., so the orchestra here plays at a very high level," David notes. "That's always a pleasure."

Because the Delaware Symphony Orchestra is a part-time orchestra, the musicians don't have the luxury of playing together every day. During the season, which runs from September through May, they perform about two weeks out of each month. But what would be considered a disadvantage by some is viewed positively by David.

"Our musicians go their various ways when they're done with us, and they do other things," he says. "They get refreshed so that when they come back to us, they're ready to play. I think the work environment is extremely positive. That's huge."

Job Description Because much of a conductor's work is done behind the scenes, many people get a one-dimensional view of the job. "What an audience member sees is just the tip of the iceberg," David explains. "The first thing you have to realize is

The symphony orchestra performs in Wilmington's Grand Opera House, an opulent landmark built in 1871. "We are extremely fortunate to play in such a lovely place," David notes.



that you have all of these people onstage, and they have one line of text in front of them. Nobody has access to the whole scoop except for me. I don't have to worry about playing a tune. I just have to worry about how all this stuff fits together."

That, as it turns out, is a terrible worry sometimes.

"If you have 80 people spread out in front of you, they all have a different sense of reality," David notes. "They're far apart from each other, and they simply need guidance. That's the down and dirty, unpoetic, nitty-gritty organizational stuff. You can hear when it doesn't work, and you can very clearly hear when it does."

Play On! Programming during the 2008-2009 season includes classical favorites as well as pieces that are somewhat off-the-beaten-path. Audiences may attend the orchestra's first-ever Martin Luther King, Jr., celebration or enjoy a pop series that features music from Bugs Bunny cartoons.

David and his musicians are driven by their belief that music feeds the soul. "What we do here is extremely important to

people's individual well-being and the well-being of the culture at large," he explains. "We feel an obligation to deliver what we do to as many people as we can."

Though he's the face of the orchestra, David says it's really not about him. It's about the music. "We want to deliver this music as we think it ought to be delivered," he muses, "so that the audience member experiences a great work of art.

"Conductors often boast outsized egos," David continues. "You couldn't do a concert without a conductor, but you also couldn't do it without a principle oboe. Or the second trombone. We all need to be here. Somebody needs to give it direction, and that happens to be my job. We're all trying to accomplish the same thing." •

Performances of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra take place at the Grand Opera House, 818 North Market Street in Wilmington. Single ticket prices vary. Call the box office at 1-800-374-7263 or (302) 652-5577 to purchase. For upcoming events visit www.delawaresymphony.org, or call (302) 656-7442.



LEFT: Delaware Symphony Orchestra musicians get only four 2½-hour rehearsals before each performance. "Everyone has to come prepared," David says. BELOW, LEFT: David spends much of his workweek studying music. It's his job to give a piece direction. BELOW: The white tie and black tails match the music, David says. "It would be weird to see Dave Matthews in tails or to see classical musicians dressed like Dave Matthews."

