

# Orchestra shines during Amado's turn with the baton for NBSO

**Thursday**

Posted at 12:01 AM

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By Keith Powers, Contributing Writer

Sometimes musical performances are not all good, and not all bad. There was plenty of both on display Saturday evening in the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center, as the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra continued the search for its next music director.

It was conductor David Amado's turn for an audition, and the seasoned maestro, longtime leader of the Delaware Symphony, compiled a terrific program. Music of Bernard Herrmann, Mozart and Berlioz filled the bill, and for the most part the maestro had the orchestra playing alertly and with passion.

He began with music from Hollywood. Perhaps given the unanimous popularity of John Williams, music that accompanies films is getting serious consideration on concert programs. It's a good thing.

Bernard Herrmann (1911-75) is hardly a household name, but his music has depth and charm. He wrote the characterful score for strings to Alfred Hitchcock's thriller "Psycho" — this after he had scored the famous "Citizen Kane."

The "Psycho Suite" has the benefit of being forever tied visually to one of the most unforgettable scenes in movie history — the shower scene.

The screeching staccato violin gesture that signals the scene — it occurs twice in the suite Herrmann extracted from the score — brought a kind of nervous laughter from the audience. The suite itself follows various moments from the movie, and was a brilliant choice as a concert opener.

As was Mozart's D minor piano concerto (No. 20) — at least from an orchestral perspective. Soloist Diane Walsh joined the orchestra in the composer's brilliantly devised match between ensemble and piano.

But it was the ensemble who took up the challenge of Mozart, not the soloist. Amado had the orchestra playing with succinct dynamics, shaping phrases and accompanying wonderfully.

Walsh, however, played like she was in a different room. Offering no interaction with her stage-mates, and little with her conductor, she played the score with distant regard.

An enormously fluffed passage immediately preceding the first-movement cadenza didn't help. The fascinating middle-movement rondo brought some life to her playing—cross-handed gestures in the agitated G minor section showed energetic engagement, for a brief time. But the famous “Mannheim rockets” — the rippling, upward scales in the last movement — failed to achieve blast-off. It was a curiously uninspired reading. A lot of it sounded like typing.

None of it seemed to be Amado's doing. The orchestra played smartly, bringing the right balance to Mozart's gestural accompaniment.

Amado programmed a true challenge after intermission — Berlioz's own “Psycho”-type score, “Symphonie Fantastique.” The shape-changing work — veering from introspective pastorage to lurid death hallucination — engages every section of the orchestra.

Amado situated the second violins across the stage from the first, near the audience. It was a subtle seating adjustment — the seconds are usually buried behind the firsts — but for this piece (and for the others on the program), the move was musically relevant.

The seconds frequently played separate ideas from the firsts, activating the score in many subtle ways. Having them out front made Berlioz's insights more accessible.

Some of the playing missed out on those ideas, however. Phrasing, especially in the distinctly pastorage-sounding first movement, was sometimes choppy and inarticulate. But the waltz-figure in the second movement snapped to life, and the “Ranz de vaches” duet (a difficult, exposed melody

prolonged with great emotion, beautifully played by English hornist Andrea Heyboar and oboist Laura Shamu) was captivating.

Amado's conducting was particularly alert to dynamics — the orchestra responding fluidly to his ideas — and just a few more coherent phrases would have created a truly inspired performance. But the ensemble's thorough preparation for each of the works was obvious, and that transferred with distinct energy to the performance.

The NBSO's next performance, Family Holiday Pops, features the return of maestro David MacKenzie as guest conductor. The program also includes the New Bedford Symphony Youth Orchestra and the Showstoppers.

Programs are Dec. 17 at 3:30 and 7:00 p.m. in the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center. For information and tickets visit [www.nbsymphony.org](http://www.nbsymphony.org) or call the Z box office at 508-994-2900.

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