

Incoming orchestra director lays out a challenging and diverse season

By Keith Powers, Contributing Writer

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“It was very important for me to make a statement at the first concert,” says newly appointed New Bedford Symphony Orchestra music director Yaniv Dinur.

So he went on the Internet.

It’s just a sign of the times, and Dinur normally operates just like any conductor would — following his love of music, and making programs that reflect it, and that complement each other.

But the Internet helped for this season, especially for Sept. 23rd’s opening night.

Online searches led Dinur to violinist Daniel Chong, first violinist in the Grammy-winning Parker String Quartet, who will highlight the season-opening program that pays tribute to Leonard Bernstein.

Many orchestras around the world will honor the centenary of Bernstein’s birth this season, and the NBSO is no different. Chong will solo in Bernstein’s “Serenade: After Plato’s Symposium.”

“I was looking for the right soloist to play the piece,” Dinur says. “Suddenly I found a video of this quartet, and this incredible violinist. I was so impressed with his playing and temperament. I hadn’t met him, but I thought he would be perfect for the ‘Serenade.’”

American composer Derek Bermel’s “Dust Dances” — a work Dinur studied with the composer, and performed as a conducting student at the University of Michigan — opens the evening. Also on the program is the first symphony of Gustav Mahler, whose popularity Bernstein was almost singlehandedly responsible for rescuing in the 1950s.

The November NBSO concert has a similar genesis. “It was another one of those late night searches,” Dinur says. “I heard him on YouTube; he was this amazing guitar player.”

Dinur is talking about Lauri Porra — who turns out to be the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius’s great-grandson, as well as being that amazing guitar player, and a composer. All of this led to Porra being invited to perform with the NBSO, in a program that will include his own concerto for electric bass guitar, as well as his great-grandfather’s First Symphony.

Season planning was not all done online, of course. Reputation has lots to do with it, and a January appearance by the renowned pianist Inon Barnatan was one of the first things Dinur arranged after he was named music director in the spring.

“We knew each other,” Dinur says of his fellow Israeli, who is currently in the midst of a three-year appointment as artist-in-association with the New York Philharmonic. “But we’ve never performed together. As soon as I got the job, he was the first one I called.

“I wanted to do Rachmaninov Three, and I was glad he was up for it. He’s a great artist, sensitive and virtuosic.

“This whole season is very special to me,” Dinur says. “One thing I wanted to do this year was ‘Rite of Spring’ — I just kept moving the parts around until I had a fit.”

Stravinsky’s great work appears on the January program, a nice addition to the Rachmaninov concerto.

“It’s such a different language,” Dinur says, “but both composers came on a similar journey, from Russia to California.”

Another formidable concert features a familiar musician—pianist Roberto Plano. Plano returns to the NBSO in May, to perform Ravel’s piano concertos — both the G major, and the Left-Hand concerto — on the same program. Debussy’s “La Mer” makes it an all-French evening.

“When I suggested both Ravel concertos, I think Roberto was shocked,” Dinur says. “Although he eventually said, ‘I like challenges, and I’m up for it.’

“I’ve always wanted to do both concertos on the same program. Ravel worked on them at the same time, but they’re like night and day. The G major is so light and joyful, and the left-hand is so dark. I hope Roberto is not sorry that he ever met me.”

Pops programs — the Holiday Pops in December, and a special film score program in March — fill out the season.

“I will continue to look for things that the NBSO hasn’t played in the last 15 years or so,” Dinur says. “There was no room for Beethoven this year — that’s bread and butter. I will definitely do Beethoven next season. Each of his symphonies is a different challenge.

“Mozart — my favorite composer — he must be included. And I will continue to do more contemporary work by American composers.

“This is the first time that I get to bring all my ideas together,” he says. “More than that — it’s also just a lot of fun.”

The New Bedford Symphony Orchestra begins its 2017-18 season on Sept. 23, with newly appointed music director Yaniv Dinur conducting a tribute to Leonard Bernstein. For information and tickets visit www.nbsymphony.org or call the Z box office at 508-994-2900.

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