

# Final conductor candidate set to lead NBSO

**Thursday**

Posted at 2:01 AM

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Sentinel-Standard

By Keith Powers, Contributing Writer

When you hear Dirk Meyer talk about his Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra, you can tell he might be ready to lead the New Bedford Symphony Orchestra.

"I didn't expect to find the quality that I found here," says the German-born conductor of his Minnesota orchestra. "Duluth is a small community, but Superior, Wisc. is just across the bridge, and I think the metro area has about 200,000 people. We have mostly local musicians, and a few that travel here.

"When I talked to the people in New Bedford, I got the feeling that I have in Duluth. It's a small community, and there's a lot going on."

Meyer comes to New Bedford on Feb. 18, the last of the four conductor finalists for the permanent position of replacing retired maestro David MacKenzie. The competition has heated up, with each of the three previous finalists - Christopher James Lees, David Amado and Yaniv Dinur - making a strong case onstage for their candidacy.

Meyer, who has degrees in music and in philosophy from his native country, and a masters and doctorate from Michigan State, leads the Lyric Opera of the North as well, also based in Duluth. He has a long association with the Sarasota Orchestra, and has guested widely in Europe and America.

He's worked with conductors like Neeme Järvi and Jorma Panula, and assisted Kevin Rhodes (director of the Springfield, Mass. symphony) in numerous opera performances in Europe.

His program with the NBSO includes Miguel del Águila's "The Giant Guitar," Beethoven's third piano concerto (Sheng Cai, soloist), and Rachmaninov's Second Symphony. "Rachmaninov is the anchor," he says, "all the rest flows from that."

Meyer has worked multiple times with Águila, who was born in Uruguay but now lives in Los Angeles.

"His music is very approachable, energetic," Meyer says. "It has a typical Latin flavor, but it has more to say than just that. His abilities to write for orchestra are just spectacular.

"The piece begins with open strings, sounding like guitar, but quickly moves into more rambunctious music. It's really a joy to listen to."

When asked about what music he truly prefers, Meyer references the second Rachmaninov symphony. "It's an example of what I like," he says. "I think the periods that I'm most comfortable with are the late Romantic, the turn-of-the-century pieces. Richard Strauss would be number one.

"Music that's well orchestrated," he says; "music that I can shape, like Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov. Even with the classics I've never been a believer in strict metronome performances. I believe in rubato, even in the classics."

Meyer keeps a busy schedule in Duluth. "We work in the typical September to May timeframe," he says of the orchestra, "with seven subscription concerts, and one concert that we designate as audience development - we add a video, or a multimedia presentation of some kind.

"And depending on funding, we do a chamber series - last year we did six concerts. We also have annual young people's concerts - last year we did two performances.

"I'm really proud of the work we do here," he says. "We have five colleges in the area, and those universities all have music departments, and many of those professors are in our orchestra. We just created an assistant conductor position as well, and that's a big step for the orchestra."

The NBSO's next program, with music director finalist Dirk Meyer conducting, will be Saturday, Feb. 18 at 7:30 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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