



Eugene, Meet Your Candidates

Symphony picks three from 300

Drum roll please, Eugene Symphony percussion, for the three impressive candidates for your new music director:

Tito Muñoz, assistant conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra; Danail Rachev, assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra; and Nir Kabaretti, music director of the Santa Barbara Symphony.

These guys, two of whom are with world-class orchestras and the other of whom already conducts his own, want to come to Eugene? Yes, according to Symphony Executive Director Paul Winberg, who spoke at a press conference Wednesday, July 16.

"We have been so thrilled with the quality of applicants for this position," says Symphony Board President Mary Ann Hansen. Roger Saydack, who has chaired each of the last three music director searches and chairs this one, believes the quality of the candidates is so high because the symphony provides "a remarkable musical artistic experience."

The committee spent hundreds of hours narrowing the almost 300 applicants down: reading résumés, watching videos, interviewing the candidates, speaking with references and then contacting more people who had worked with each candidate.

Symphony horn player and committee member Lydia Van Dreel says that the 24-year-old Muñoz, born in Brooklyn and a graduate of Julliard, "has a real grace and a natural charm ... and a command beyond his years." When Muñoz stepped in for an ailing guest conductor at the Cincinnati Symphony in early 2007, the *Cincinnati Post* reviewer wrote that he "lit up the drab, rainy night with music shimmering in color."

Rachev, who's Bulgarian, just moved to the Philadelphia Orchestra after three years as assistant conductor for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. After his farewell concert in Dallas, classical music critic Scott Cantrell wrote that Rachev "is a more sophisticated, more musically expressive conductor than plenty of big-name baton twirlers out there." Van Dreel adds that where Muñoz has "an effervescent musical flow that bubbles out," Rachev "has a dark, sultry intensity that's amazing."

Van Dreel says that Kabaretti, born in Israel and with conducting experience all over the world, "has a James Bond appeal. You expect him to be able to conduct and not break a sweat because he's just so good." Saydack adds that Kabaretti's time with the Vienna State Opera gives him a strong background in vocal music.

Each candidate blows into Eugene for a full five-day rehearsal and performance schedule next season so that the musicians, board members and audience can evaluate them in person. In previous searches, candidates have come for two days.

Van Dreel says that the musicians appreciate the chance to see each candidate over a longer period of time. "The fact that there have been people donating money so that we can double our time with the candidates — the musicians are just so grateful."

Saydack says he's happy with the process as well. He wants to make sure the new conductor knows how to bridge that space between the Silva's stage and the house seats because "the orchestra has always played with great passion and great feeling. It truly plays music for the audience."

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