

DSO names new executive director, Alan Jordan from Vermont



Betsy Price, The News Journal 3:14 p.m. EDT July 22, 2015



(Photo: Courtesy of Johnathan Ripsom)

Alan Jordan never expected to leave Vermont for an even smaller state, but he's doing just that as he moves to Wilmington to take over as executive director of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra.

Jordan, 54, was in Wilmington this week for a symphony board meeting Tuesday night and house hunting on Wednesday. Most recently the executive director of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra, he starts work in Delaware in September.

"The Delaware Symphony Orchestra is an old orchestra," he said, while pacing around a real estate office trying to find a good cell signal. "It's got a great history. It's an orchestra that's certainly seen some serious challenges in recent years. The music director, the musicians and the board have really worked miracles to get the orchestra away from the edge of a cliff. And I think the orchestra is poised for a period of growth. I wouldn't say rebirth. But I think there are opportunities to take the orchestra in new direction."

The Delaware Symphony Orchestra's 2016 budget is \$1.4 million. Jordan hopes to focus on making the orchestra more of a statewide institution, to add music beyond classical and to increase the educational programming. He's particularly pleased with the board.

"They are very enthusiastic. They are young professionals. They are really focused on making the DSO a much stronger organization and much more relevant," Jordan said. "There's a lot of energy there with the Delaware Symphony orchestra. I think there's a lot of opportunity."

Jordan replaces Diana Milburn, who resigned in January. She helped pull the symphony out of a period of turmoil that saw a season canceled, grants not renewed and other troubles.

The new director holds a degree in vocal performance from the New England Conservatory of Music, where he met his wife, Karen, who was also a vocal major. Jordan said he realized early in his college career that he didn't have the drive he needed to make a career of singing and began to focus on management, serving as assistant stage manager and later stage manager for the Tanglewood Music Center in Boston and as house manager of Jordan Hall and instrument librarian at the New England Conservatory.

He worked as the executive director of the Brevard Symphony Orchestra in Florida and the New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra before moving to Vermont 16 years ago. He resigned there in May to focus on some family issues, including his daughter's wedding in August.

He saw DSO perform in May of 2012 – pre-financial trauma – and his daughter, Katie, who is a horn player, has been a sub for the orchestra. His wife, Karen, has been a choral director for a combined middle and high school. Their son, Christopher, is entering his sophomore year at Indiana University as a bass trombone player.

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The Vermont orchestra is a year-round group that just finished their two-week summer festival tour. It has a \$1.75 million budget with 49 contracted musicians. It often hires additional musicians for specific shows, he said.

Jordan has known DSO music director David Amado, partly because the classical music world is small and people generally run into each other, he said. His daughter attended the Mid-Atlantic Music Festival in Maine that Amado is involved with.

Jordan grew up 45 minutes north of Wilmington in Edgewater park, just south of Burlington. He's fond of telling friends in Vermont that he grew up on Exit 5 of the Jersey Turnpike, because that's a way Vermont residents identify locations. His family moved to Vermont late in his high school years.

From 2001 to 2003, Jordan served on the Board of Directors of the League of American Orchestras, the national leadership service organization of American orchestras. He currently serves on the League's Communications Advisory Group and on the New Music for America Steering Committee. Previously, he has served on the League's Public Value, Collaborative Data Project, and BMI Negotiations task forces, the Ford Made in America I and II steering committees, and on the Henry Fogel Consortium Commission steering committee. He is the immediate past chair of the New England Orchestra Consortium, and was previously that organization's treasurer.

He would like to see DSO schedule pops concerts and offer more to families, as well as increase education.

"One of the challenges most nonprofits and certain orchestras see compared to other businesses is that they really don't have risk capital," Jordan says. "When you try something new, it has to succeed. That makes it very difficult. People get very conservative in their thinking on this. I see there being ways of doing both."

He's also prepared, he said, to cope with the challenges of dealing with an organization that has Vienna Philharmonic tastes on a kazoo budget.

"The Boston Symphony is not able to fulfill all of its artistic dreams," Jordan said, "but the idea is to have great and open conversations about what we'd love to do and what we'd like to do and then go out and find the support that's needed to make things happen."

DSO's 2015-16 season, which it's calling The Season of the Bells, begins with a Sept. 11 memorial concert featuring the Mozart Requiem. The season will include the Classics Concert Series of five programs and the Chamber Concert Series of four programs, as well as Explorer Experience concerts for school children. Amado, in his 13th year as music director, will conduct the season's concerts.

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