

**Asheville Symphony welcomes Music Director Darko Butorac,  
Promotes Asheville Amadeus Festival Highlights**  
by Judy LaMée

*OLLI at UNC Asheville proudly boasts connections with its community partners. The Asheville Symphony is one that involves many of our members. This is the first in a series of occasional articles about those partnerships.*

Darko Butorac (pronounced Boo - toh - raats) bonded immediately with orchestra members and our community while interviewing here, and joyfully sealed that bond when he took over the baton as Asheville Symphony's new music director last June. "It was magical to reconnect with the orchestra [after such a lengthy interview process]," he says. That magic continues.

Darko speaks with passion and compassion, energy and enthusiasm – about all the ways music connects with life's forces, and vice versa. His demanding schedule, leading three symphony orchestras (Asheville, Missoula MT and Tallahassee FL) would leave most folks exhausted. But there's even more: he also takes the podium as a highly regarded guest conductor on world stages. When asked how he maintains the pace, chuckling, he says he runs on coffee, and tries to stay healthy.

The Serbian-born conductor speaks of his respect for our orchestra. His appreciation of their strengths only heightened at this season's first Masterworks concert. He has great admiration for his predecessor, Daniel Meyer, and the program Daniel nurtured here. "I knew this was a strong orchestra. I knew there was great talent. Musicians in this orchestra have really good attitudes and are very easy to work with. It's a two-way street, requiring willing partners." That partnership is off to a very strong start, one built on mutual respect.

Darko shares his excitement for the biennial Asheville Amadeus Festival, which this year is March 15 - 24. One reason, he says, is being able to reach deep into the area's wealth of musical talents and genres. Amping up from the previous two Amadeus Festivals which featured one headliner, this year's festival proudly boasts two: native son superstar guitarist Warren Haynes and world-renowned pianist Garrick Ohlsson.

Asheville Amadeus 2019 includes 30 events stretching across the community, "inspired by the things we believe Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart would have loved. This year we are thrilled to host two of the world's leading musicians: rock guitarist Warren Haynes and Rach [Rachmaninoff] pianist Garrick Ohlsson," according to the Symphony's website at <https://ashevillesymphony.org/asheville-amadeus/>

David Whitehill, the Symphony's Executive Director, proudly announced that tickets to many events cost less than \$20; some youth tickets are priced at \$5, still others are free. Events range from beer to fashion to music, and include ballet, educational outreach, and all manner of things promoting great music in Asheville. Program choices reflect a commitment to incorporate a broad variety of music genres, reaching deep into the interests of our Western North Carolina populace.

Darko Butorac reflects that this broad program is special and rare, perfectly suited to this community along with its desire for art and beauty. "You won't see such a combination as this, even in New York City, breaking the stereotype of what the orchestra is. Such a cornucopia of great music incorporating such tremendous talent. For our youth orchestra to have the opportunity to make music with Garrick Ohlsson - someone of that caliber - is amazing," recalling his own transformative experience playing in youth orchestras. For these students to have that experience really moves him. His slightly selfish reaction, he says, is the ability to have this concert featuring two of the greatest works written [Rachmaninoff] with Garrick Ohlsson as interpreter. "To sum up," he concludes, "I'm incredibly excited about how Asheville Amadeus has grown to accomplish this. I am thrilled about that and looking ahead to planning many more in the future."