

New VSO Director Thinks Outside the Box

By AMY LILLY



Ben Cadwallader, the new executive director of the **Vermont Symphony Orchestra**, is 31 years old and has been on the job less than two months. But he arrives riding a West Coast wave of change.

Cadwallader is fresh from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he was education programs manager under the also-young star music director Gustavo Dudamel. LA culture, says the new VSO hire, is "built around innovation; it's an imperative. The *expectation* is that new ideas will be outside the box. I'm definitely importing that here."

Among the "new ways of presenting our art" that Cadwallader envisions for the orchestra in 2016 and beyond is a concert series he is tentatively calling VSO:muse. He envisions it as a celebration of place.

"It's important to connect with what it means to be a Vermonter," says Cadwallader, a native of South Burlington who played oboe in the **Vermont Youth Orchestra**. "There's such a connection to nature [here], an obsession with the local, and there's Lake Champlain. I'd love to commission a composer to write something dedicated to the lake." (In LA, Cadwallader enlarged the Philharmonic's Composer Fellowship Program for exceptional high school composers to include college- and master's-level composers.)

VSO:muse concerts might take place at the Green Mountain Audubon Center in Huntington, where the program could explore the influence of birdsong on classical composers such as Messaien; or on the *Spirit of Ethan Allen*, where Debussy's *La Mer* and other water-themed music would be played during a cruise. Cadwallader also envisions a **Burlington Discover Jazz Festival** collaboration showcasing the influence of that relatively new musical form on classical, and a concert at **ArtsRiot** in Burlington focused on local food and music.

These concerts, which would necessarily involve only a selection of musicians, wouldn't replace the VSO's Masterworks series or its main mission to perform orchestra-level music. Cadwallader's parents began bringing him to Masterworks when he was in fourth grade, he says. But with fewer families attending classical concerts these days, other methods are needed to reach the next generation of listeners.

Gabriel Langfur of Boston, the VSO's bass trombone player since 1993, was one of two musicians on the search committee for a new director. (The other was University of Vermont music professor and percussionist **Tom Toner**.) Recalls Langfur, "One of the things that really excited [the committee] about Ben was that creative drive."

Langfur, a faculty member of the VYO's summer camp from 1999 to 2013, observed Cadwallader's creativity and charisma early on: "Ben was there when I started," he recalls. "He was not only a star musician, but he always had a bunch of students around him because he was planning something cool."

Asked to compare Cadwallader with his predecessor, Alan Jordan, Langfur notes that Jordan's primary legacy was to carefully build up the VSO's first endowment during — and despite — the Great Recession. In Jordan's new job as executive director of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra, he is proving again to be "a very stabilizing force," reports Langfur, who has talked with appreciative musician friends in that orchestra.

Cadwallader is in some ways Jordan's opposite. As Langfur comments, "It may be Ben is the right kind of personality to convince the board — who are rightly conservative — to draw on that endowment."

Cadwallader says he's not afraid to fail. His success, meanwhile, will be measured using specific metrics such as return customers: "I want to see the same people in two months, in six months, in a year," he quips. Also vital is expanded underwriting support, which Cadwallader envisions including the likes of Burton and **Dealer.com**.

Dealer wouldn't underwrite a Masterworks concert, he adds. But the young digital marketing company might support a concert if it involved "taking a chairlift to the top of Stowe."

The original print version of this article was headlined "Facing the Music: New VSO Director Thinks Outside the Box"

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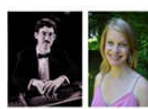
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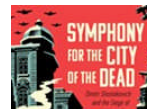
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