

Octavio Más-Arocas to make conducting debut with the BW Symphony Orchestra September 26

by Daniel Hathaway



There'll be a festive fanfare when Spanish-born conductor Octavio Más-Arocas conducts his first concert with the Baldwin Wallace Symphony Orchestra on Friday, September 26, but that new piece by Kevin C. Thompson is only the first of several curtain-raisers BW's new orchestral maestro has planned in a continuing series he calls "The Symphony Orchestra Fanfare Project."

Más-Arocas comes to Berea with an impressive dossier, including conducting posts at Interlochen Arts Academy and the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music. Among his other credits, he has served as assistant to Kurt Masur with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. In a telephone conversation, he told us that he's looking forward to working with his new musicians. "Baldwin

Wallace has a very good group of students, very talented and hard-workers. This is an exciting period at the University with many changes. It's the right moment to be here."

The conductor noted that the Fanfare Project is something he has brought with him to different posts he has held. At Baldwin Wallace, every orchestral concert will begin with a fanfare composed by a student, alumnus or faculty member, "written for brass, percussion or whatever forces we have," he said. "The fanfares will call the audience together before the orchestra is even on the stage. Thompson, who is a member of BW's class of 2017, has named his work for brass quintet *A New Beginning*, a fitting title for the debut of a new member of the BW conducting staff.

After the fanfare, Más-Arocas will lead the BW Symphony in a work by the University's resident composer, Clint Needham, whose music the conductor first heard during a summer at Aspen. "It was an amazing, great experience. Clint is one of the most talented composers in America, a real force in the field. I thought, here is a composer I want to perform." Friday evening's concert marks only the second performance of *Suburban*

Grooves — it was commissioned and premiered by the Iowa State University Orchestra. Needham describes it as “a quirky, fun, and, at times, crass portrayal of suburban life.”

Another new work, David Little’s *Haunted Topography*, will follow the Needham. “It was composed for Alarm Will Sound,” Más-Arocas said, “and then Little rescored it for orchestra.” The work is a meditation on the story of a woman whose son had been killed in Vietnam and who couldn’t move beyond her pain until she saw a map showing the place where he died.

The David Little piece will be preceded by a poem written and read by Angelica M. Washington of the class of 2017. “Angelica is a wonderful cellist in the orchestra who began as a music major but switched from music to creative writing,” Más-Arocas noted. She wrote a poem based on David Little’s heart-breaking piece what will make a perfect, talking transition between *Suburban Grooves* and *Haunted Topography*.”

BW’s new orchestral conductor will end his program with a standard work, Maurice Ravel’s orchestration of Modest Mussorgsky’s piano suite, *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Is that a challenge for Más-Arocas and his new colleagues? “Because it’s really a concerto for orchestra, it’s a challenge for every orchestra — and for many reasons. In this case, it’s a matter of getting to know each other, and getting used to my conception of sound and what I want. Over time, this will get easier. The piece is challenging, but everybody’s very enthusiastic.”

And is Octavio Más-Arocas at all worried about beginning the first concert of his tenure with three recent works by young composers? Not at all. “The new music is not abrasive. It’s very audience-friendly, very engaging, and very beautiful.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 23, 2014.

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