

Pittsburgh Philharmonic maestro's debut set at BC3's Succop Theater

Oct. 1, 2019



Daniel Nesta Curtis, 33, will make his debut as maestro of the Pittsburgh Philharmonic during the symphony orchestra's "Resound, Renew and Reclaim" concert Oct. 27 at the Succop Theater on Butler County Community College's main campus in Butler Township. Photo by Alisa Garin Photography.

(Butler, PA) Thirty-three-year-old native Key Wester Daniel Nesta Curtis will spend the morning of Oct. 27 in silence, hearing in his "mind's ear" the crescendos and decrescendos of the four movements the Pittsburgh Philharmonic will perform during his debut as maestro of the symphony orchestra at 3 that afternoon at Butler County Community College.

"It's about getting the music to flow inside of me before I step out onto the stage," Curtis said. "I will spend a lot of time just hearing the music, the sound of the orchestra, in my mind's ear as a way of preparing for the performance."

With his black tuxedo to the back of guests within the 442-seat Succop Theater – "no tails," he said, "an unnecessary vestige of past times" – he'll stand upon a 6-inch podium and wave with

his right hand a 16-inch baton to direct the 50 musicians playing stringed instruments, the 12 on brass, the eight on woodwinds and the three on percussion.

Among those in attendance for his debut, he believes, will be his mother, Libby, of Key West, Fla., and friends and relatives for the 95-minute “Resound, Renew and Reclaim” performance that includes a 15-minute intermission.

The concert will feature Mozart’s “Overture to The Magic Flute”; Samuel Coleridge-Taylor’s “Petite Suite de Concert”; “Deep River,” composed by Harry Burleigh and arranged by Coleridge-Taylor; and Antonin Dvorak’s “Symphony No. 9, from the New World.”



Members of the Pittsburgh Philharmonic perform during an Aug. 25 season preview concert in the Succop Theater on Butler County Community College’s main campus in Butler Township. Daniel Nesta Curtis, 33, will make his debut as maestro of the symphony orchestra at the Succop Theater during an Oct. 27 concert titled “Resound, Renew and Reclaim.”

Tickets cost \$15 for general admission, \$13 for seniors and \$10 for students, and can be purchased online at bc3.edu/theater, by calling 724-284-8505, or at the box office Oct. 27.

Directing “sharp attacks” and “gentle attacks”

Curtis auditioned for music director of the Pittsburgh Philharmonic at the Succop Theater in March, one of two finalists for the job, and in July was selected to replace Edward Leonard, who served as the symphony orchestra’s music conductor for 11 seasons, Curtis said.

Larry Stock, director of BC3’s Cultural Center, lauds Curtis’ musical talents – the Pittsburgh resident is a former bassoonist who will play piano and accompany violinist Kathleen Andrews, concert master of the philharmonic, during the short spiritual “Deep River.”

“I am very excited about Daniel’s debut,” Stock said. “He’s a very qualified and talented musician.”

The Pittsburgh Philharmonic’s Oct. 27 concert will be followed by three others through May 16 at the Succop Theater, whose acoustics, Stock said, “allow everything that is being played on stage to be heard very easily. You can hear every instrument, all without amplification, from the oboe to the piccolo to the harp. The balance is always wonderful.”

Curtis is a faculty member of the school of music at Carnegie Mellon University, where in 2012 he received a master’s degree in instrumental conducting.

He'll take the reins of the orchestra Oct. 27, and direct the musicians' "sharp attacks" and "gentle attacks" with the baton – a "magnifier" of his gestures, he said.

"If you move your hands in a nice little arc, it makes a shape," Curtis said. "You put a baton in that hand, and that arc is three times as big because of that extension. It makes my hand and arm visible to musicians who may be 50 feet away from me at the back of the orchestra."

Those musicians will follow Curtis' gestures in performing "Overture to the Magic Flute," which Curtis calls "wonderful, energetic"; "Petite Suite de Concert," a "gorgeous piece"; and Dvorak's "Symphony No. 9, from the New World," one "that an orchestra and a conductor can really make a statement with."

The crescendos and decrescendos of which he will have heard in his mind's ear earlier that morning.

"I will have as quiet a day as I can and really sit with the music," Curtis said. "I'm not going to be out doing a ton of things. Rather, I'll have a quiet morning where I will look over each piece, and hear the performance that I hope to hear later that day, just in my head."