

'Astounding': Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra's opening night

by [Steve Staruch](#), Minnesota Public Radio

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St. Paul, Minn. — Seldom does an audience show its hunger for music like the audience at the DECC this past Saturday night. The Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra (DSSO) opened its season with a performance that garnered three standing ovations. Three!

Dirk Meyer, starting his second season as music director of the DSSO, insists that his players be bold. He insists that each section play out. The result was astounding. The DSSO hummed like a German sports car.

The concert began with two rhapsodies. Both featured Grammy Award-winning pianist John Novacek. The Rachmaninoff "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini" was a colorful romp through the well-loved theme, orchestra and soloist playing with sensitivity and power. There were times when Novacek almost leaped into the keyboard, creating a fantastic percussion effect. The 18th variation, the creamy-sounding one, felt like liquid velvet.

The Rachmaninoff completed, Novacek left the stage, turned around and came right back for the Rhapsody in Blue. How do you describe well-planned jazz? From the opening clarinet swoop, to the whaa-whaa effects in trumpet and trombone, to the jazzy (and delicious) occasional re-harmonization in the piano part, each section sounded wickedly good. Every time the pieces turned a corner, there was something new to listen to and delight in.

The Symphonic Dances by Rachmaninoff closed the program. This valedictory piece (Rachmaninoff's last orchestral work) had an instrumental golden glow about it. Life and all that is not life do battle, and life-giving spirit wins the day.

The DSSO and Meyer created a wonderful instrumental tapestry, creating the lasting impression that this is an orchestra and conductor that will only continue to grow. Its audience will no doubt come back for more and more!



Grammy Award-winning pianist John Novacek is applauded for his performance of Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini" with the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra. (JoAnn Jardine Studio One Photography)

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