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TIMES-CALL

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**New<sup>3</sup>**

Niwot Timberline Symphony Orchestra to open new season with new music, new conductor

*By Quentin Young*  
*Longmont Times-Call*

LONGMONT — Philadelphia composer Jennifer Higdon's orchestral work "blue cathedral" is not even 10 years old and does not often appear on American symphonic programs.

But it is one of the pieces the Niwot Timberline Symphony Orchestra will perform at its season opener next month.

At the orchestra's second concert of the season, in November, it will perform a piece by composer Daniel Brito that is so new nobody has heard it yet, not even NTS's conductor.

The conductor himself is new to the orchestra.

Devin Patrick Hughes takes up the NTS baton this year as the group's music director following a selection process to replace Brian St. John, who led the orchestra for 12 years.

Hughes is a champion of new music, and he wants to expose audiences to contemporary work.

"There's so many great composers writing today," he said. "My feeling in programming is challenging is the only way to do it."

In May, pianist Aldo Ragone will play a rarely-performed piano concerto by Alexander Scriabin.

"I'm guessing this will be a Colorado premiere," Hughes said.

The newness of the upcoming NTS season extends even to Hughes' age. He's only 28, younger than most of the musicians he will be conducting.

But that doesn't concern him, and it doesn't concern other members of the volunteer orchestra, either.

Sofia Dalzell, co-president of the orchestra's board of directors, said Hughes was chosen after a rigorous selection process that included input from the musicians themselves.

"He's extremely enthusiastic," Dalzell said. "He's also got, even though he's somewhat young, a lot of experience."

Hughes is an artist diploma student at the University of Denver. Besides his position with NTS, he said, he is resident conductor with the Denver Philharmonic Orchestra, assistant conductor with the Denver Young Artist Orchestra and is the founding music director of the new Denver Contemporary Chamber Players.

"It seems to me all you have to do is have white hair and a hunched back to get respect as a conductor," Hughes joked. "If I take a role of guide, leader, not conductor, not dictator, if I just let things happen, that's my conducting style ... If you show them you know the music and have passion for the music, the people will follow."



Niwot Timberline Symphony Orchestra member Barbara Siefkes has been playing violin for 26 years. She plays during the NTS's first rehearsal of the season last month at Niwot High School.

**Morgan Varon/Times-Call**

**If you go**

**What:** Performance by Niwot Timberline Symphony Orchestra at Niwot Nostalgia Day

**When:** 11:30 a.m. Saturday

**Where:** Downtown Niwot

**Season opener:** 7:30 p.m. Oct. 11, Niwot High School

**Info:** 303-652-6622 or [www.timberlinesymphony.org](http://www.timberlinesymphony.org)

Hughes is an Illinois native. He said he had an early interest in music and began playing trombone even before his arms were long enough to reach all the slide positions.

His parents often went to the symphony in Chicago, and his mother played guitar and sang, Hughes said.

He recalls in his preteen years coming home from seeing musicals such as "Les Misérables" and conducting an imaginary orchestra.

Hughes later earned a master's degree in conducting from Ithica College.

Brito, the composer whose new piece Niwot Timberline Symphony Orchestra will perform Nov. 16, is the orchestra's first official composer in residence, a position Hughes proposed and the NTS board approved for this season. (Hughes noted, however, that St. John wrote original pieces that the orchestra performed during his tenure.)

Another new program Hughes plans for this season is "Talk Back," a series of after-concert discussions.

At the season's last concert, the orchestra will perform Tchaikovsky's "Symphony No. 5." Hughes said he wants to ask audience members at the concert to vote for which fifth symphony they'd like to hear in the next season. The choices, of course, will include Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and others who wrote at least five symphonies.

Before the official start of the orchestra's season, it will perform for Niwot Nostalgia Day, at 11:30 a.m. Saturday in downtown Niwot.

The program includes works by Richard Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Aaron Copland and Jacques Offenbach, and features violinist Rachel Klaus.

During the regular season, St. John will return to conduct the orchestra's Dec. 13 performance of "The Nutcracker." The show is a collaboration with Longmont Dance Theatre, which is operated by St. John's wife, Kristin.

The St. Johns will also lead the NTS/Longmont Dance Theatre Spring Gala Ballet in May, which features Brian St. John's score for "Pinocchio."

Quentin Young can be reached at 303-684-5319 or [qyoung@times-call.com](mailto:qyoung@times-call.com).