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Opening night in Nashua: In his first concert as the Nashua Symphony's new music director, conductor Jonathan McPhee started off his tenure with strong performances of a bouquet of entertaining scores.

With a fairly large audience (about 800 people) on hand for opening night on Saturday, Oct. 4, at Nashua's Keefe Auditorium, McPhee and the orchestra delivered lively and well-played renditions of Smetena's "The Moldau," Kodály's "Peacock" Variations, and Dvorák's "New World" Symphony No. 9.

McPhee programmed the concert without a soloist so as to keep the spotlight on the orchestra, and it certainly did. All sections had their moments in each piece, with the brass standing out impressively in bringing to life the Kodály score's tart harmonies.

For me, the real achievement of the night was making the familiar New World Symphony sound fresh and exciting. The piece is such a warhorse, it wasn't that long ago that the Nashua High School band played an overblown arrangement of the finale as part of its half-time routine.

But McPhee worked wonders with the music, somehow finding a way to let the players discover the piece all over again. The result was a fresh-sounding "New World" that ebbed and flowed with life from the downbeat to the final chord. It held together — and held interest — for all four movements.

- Jeff Rapsis