

# Scott Seaton, Music Director for North State Symphony

[www.enjoymagazine.net/2017/10/25/157815/scott-seaton-music-director-for-north-state-symphony](http://www.enjoymagazine.net/2017/10/25/157815/scott-seaton-music-director-for-north-state-symphony)



## Music Man

---

November 2017

By Laura Christman

Photo courtesy of North State Symphony

It's easy to access music — at home, in the car, through a phone. But listening to a live orchestra is a whole different adventure. The timbres and textures of the various instruments become a single sound that swells and rolls through the concert hall.

“It can be a powerful and transformative experience,” says Scott Seaton, music director of North State Symphony. “You are next to people hearing the same thing in that space. In that hall, you are community.”

Seaton, 35, is in his third year directing the symphony, which formed in 2001 with the merging of orchestras in Chico and Redding. He's the second conductor to take to the podium, replacing Kyle Wiley Pickett, who left in 2014 for another position.

The biggest challenge of the job, Seaton says, is “trying to find ways to get people in the hall who haven't been there.” But, he adds, that's also the fun part.

Seaton is high-energy. Which is to put it mildly. He operates full-throttle whether conducting, planning, programming or promoting.

“He’s the change we didn’t know we needed,” says Patty Mullett, president of the North State Symphony League of Redding.

Seaton wants the symphony to expand its reach — bring in more people of different ages, experiences and musical tastes. He launched North State Symphony Pops last year to add bluegrass, country collaborations and other genres to the repertoire. The Pops concerts in April will showcase works by John Williams, composer of the “Harry Potter,” “Jurassic Park” and “Indiana Jones” film scores.

Seaton is putting more emphasis on contemporary composers in the symphony’s regular-season Masterworks series. William Bolcom’s “Commedia for (almost) 18th Century Orchestra” and the premiere of Redding composer Dan Pinkston’s “Concerto for Violin and Orchestra” join iconic classical pieces like Beethoven’s “Symphony No. 7” and Stravinsky’s “Firebird Suite” in this season’s four-concert lineup.

“I think there has to be a certain amount of variety in a program,” Seaton says. “Would you really want to eat the same food every time?”

He connects to concert-goers with pre-concert talks, sharing why a piece was written or what to listen for. “You need to do a good job preparing the audience,” he says.

Seaton is working on expanding the symphony’s education program, which includes musician visits to schools and concerts geared to children.

“Getting kindergarten through high-school students engaged and into this world of art and music is crucial,” he says.

Seaton picked up the saxophone as a public school fifth-grader in Lapeer, Mich., because he wanted to learn the “Pink Panther” theme. His introduction to conducting came through high school marching band in Mount Juliet, Tenn. He has degrees from Université de Montréal, New England Conservatory and Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University.

“I just did the things I loved. I majored in music and majored in math,” Seaton says. “Music is very math-centric. Everything you hear is based on a numerical system.”

Conducting is a small slice of his job. Seaton reads scores (often in a Chico coffee shop), plans programs, secures guest artists, meets donors and is involved in fundraising and marketing. Outside of work, he’s a long-distance bicycle rider and marathoner.

“I stay pretty busy,” he says.

The North State Symphony selected Seaton after a lengthy audition process. Cellist Robert Zadra, part of the search committee, recalls watching YouTube videos, with the sound turned off, of Seaton conducting. “I could hear the music through Scott’s movements on the podium. Right there, I knew we would be lucky to have him.”

Seaton praises the musicianship of the orchestra and their willingness to test limits.

“They are fantastic human beings; they are great musicians,” he says.

His approach is collaborative. Violinist Matthew Raley says in rehearsals, Seaton “is able to combine high musical standards with good-natured interaction.”

“I call Scott the orchestra whisperer,” Concertmaster Terrie Baune says. “He has an uncanny ability to bring out the best player in each of us.”

The orchestra has 65 core musicians (more players are added depending on pieces performed). About half live in Redding or Chico, while others are from Sacramento, Winters, Vacaville and beyond.

Rehearsal time is squeezed — typically three rehearsals prior to performance. Musicians and conductor must be tuned into each other. “It’s almost like playing a game of chess. You go in with a plan,” Seaton says, “but you have to be able to deviate from the plan ... You can’t have stock gestures. It’s a constant process of reading each other.”

On stage, “We are in the zone, having an adventure together,” he says.

The next North State Symphony concerts are Nov. 11 in Chico and Nov. 12 in Redding. Holiday concerts are Dec. 8 in Chico, Dec. 9 in Red Bluff, Dec. 10 in Redding.

For complete calendar, visit [www.northstatesymphony.org](http://www.northstatesymphony.org).



**Laura Christman** is a freelance writer in Redding with a degree from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and a long career in newspaper journalism. Contact her at [laurachristman14@gmail.com](mailto:laurachristman14@gmail.com).