

Music planned a career for me

{ Dallas Symphony Orchestra conductor Jaap van Zweden talks about his love of music }

By Charlie Owen
DAILY CORRESPONDENT

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THAT THE CONDUCTOR of an orchestra could dig rock 'n' roll. When you're concerned with cellos, oboes and violins 24 hours a day, it seems as if electric guitars, drums and the bass would just have to take a back seat. Not so for Jaap van Zweden (pronounced Yap fun Zwayden), conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. When rolling down the highway in his car, he's jamming to Earth, Wind & Fire, Chicago and the Eagles.

"These guys are my heroes of pop music," Van Zweden said during a recent phone interview.

Of course, Van Zweden is the very skilled conductor of a major orchestra, so listening to rock music is only a luxury. Most of his time is spent making sure the orchestra is playing at its very best, a challenge that he has no problem living up to.

Van Zweden returns to Vail for the third summer in a row with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. The opening night concert is set for today at the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater in Vail.

"He is making his mark all over the world right now as a real orchestra builder, as a quintessential maestro," said Jacqueline Taylor, Bravo!'s artistic administrator.

'Music was my first big love'

Van Zweden began bushwhacking his musical path as a violin player as a young boy in Amsterdam, where he was born, and he quickly excelled at the instrument. He later attended The Julliard School to advance his musical training.

"Being involved with music was the only thing I wanted to do," Van Zweden said. "Music was my first big love, but I never planned a career in music; it's like music planned a career for me."

But after years of playing with orchestras, Van Zweden went from facing the audience while playing to turning his back to it as a conductor. How this transition came about was rather humorous, Van Zweden said.

One day while rehearsing for a performance in Berlin, Van

Jaap van Zweden, page B2



if you go ...

What: Dallas Symphony Orchestra opening night.
Where: Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater, Vail.
When: 6 p.m. today.
Cost: \$24 for lawn seats and \$48 to \$60 for covered pavilion seats.
More information: Call 877-812-5700, or visit www.vailmusic.org.

... Dallas Symphony Orchestra conductor Jaap van Zweden, center, leads the string section during a Bravo! concert last year at the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater in Vail. Van Zweden said he's excited to return to Vail.

KRISTIN ANDERSON
Daily file photo

JAAP VAN ZWEDEN

FROM PAGE B1

Zweden said his conductor, Leonard Bernstein, asked him to conduct the orchestra so Bernstein could go to the back of the hall to hear how the acoustics sounded.

"I said, 'Look Lenny, I can't do this,' to which Bernstein responded, 'That's possible, but do it anyway.'"

So Van Zweden gave it a stab. Afterward Bernstein told him it was pretty bad but to continue anyway.

"So I continued doing what he said I could not do," Van Zweden said.

And he hasn't looked back since.

When asked if it was hard to make the transition from player to conductor, Van Zweden said not at all. He pretty much gave up playing to focus

on conducting full time and said he doesn't miss playing at all.

"The reason I went into conducting is that I didn't want to be involved only with the violin; I wanted to do other things," Van Zweden said. "You have to work every day to know your scores. It's very important to get up as someone who wants to learn new things every day because if you think you know everything about music, that's the end of your career."

'I could not live without it'

To achieve what Van Zweden has so far in his career, it's not a matter of just loving what you do — it takes commitment and a lot of it.

"It's dedication for your whole life," Van Zweden said. "You sacrifice, but what you get back is so

unique that I could not live without it, to be honest."

He's been the chief conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and Chamber Orchestras, as well as the chief conductor of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic of Belgium. He's also worked with the Chicago, Philadelphia and Cleveland orchestras, to name a few. His resume is too long to list. For the time being, he's settled into his position as conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and said he's thrilled to be working with such talented artists.

"The incredible potential of this orchestra amazes me every year more and more," Van Zweden said. "The love affair which we had three years ago is still there, and that's quite amazing."