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MAGAZINE

from the NORTH CAROLINA SYMPHONY | SPRING 2010

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GREAT MUSIC MATTERS! THE ELEVATOR QUESTION

Sometimes when I'm interviewing applicants for an open position on the North Carolina Symphony's staff, I ask them my Elevator Question. I tell the candidates to imagine that they've got the job and they're on their way up to a meeting in one of downtown Raleigh's office towers when the elevator lurches to a halt between floors. After eyeing each other warily for a few moments, eventually the passengers strike up a conversation – after all, they don't know if they're stuck together for a few seconds or a few hours. Eventually the talk turns to what everybody does for a living, and when the prospective staffer says "I work for the North Carolina Symphony," one of the other passengers offers a challenge: "Why should the Symphony receive public support instead of just selling tickets or raising money privately?" I ask the applicant what they would say in response.

Essentially I'm testing for two things. First, I want to see if they have a genuine, fire-in-the-belly passion for the arts and what they do for our community, and second, I want to determine if they can articulate that passion succinctly and successfully. I've heard quite a range of responses, but nobody has ever asked me what my answer would be to the Elevator Question. Here goes...

I could begin by talking about the dramatic effect that arts education curricula can have on elementary school test scores and high school dropout rates, or the economic impact that the creative arts have on our state's domestic product. Both of these approaches are worthwhile and compelling arguments, of course. But I would first reframe the question, to what I believe is at the very core of it: why do we need art in the first place? What purpose does it serve in our lives?

As long as we've been human, we've created. Every culture that has ever graced the Earth has sung, drummed, drawn, or danced. This primal need is obviously in our nature. From the cave paintings found at places such as Altamira, Spain, and Lascaux, France, we know that people have recorded impressions of their lives for more than 15,000 years and counting. As members of the same species, we are separated by both miles and millennia, and yet we all have the same urge – to communicate something about ourselves to those around us.

Why do we have this genetic imperative to tell stories and sing, dance, or paint?

I believe the answer is simple: to be human is to be a social animal. We can't exist in isolation. We must compare our experiences, our feelings, our reactions to the events in our lives – both joyful and tragic – with others in order to reassure ourselves that we are not

alone, trapped in our own little cocoon. It's why Shakespeare's plays are still relevant four hundred years after they were created; it's said that every conceivable human situation is captured in his pages. All of the good and all of the bad that happens to us has happened to others before us and will happen to still more after us.

From one translation of the first chapter of Ecclesiastes: "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." Rather than take these words as evidence of the futility of life, as many interpretations do, I find comfort in them. However much we suffer, we know that others have too, and survived. We also know that people before us have found great meaning and happiness in their lives together. How do we know that? Because they've told us, in their songs and paintings, their symphonies, operas, plays and ballets. And in turn we must create our own art so that future civilizations can know us.

Back to the original Elevator Question: Why should the Symphony receive government support? To ensure that this essential ability to connect with each other is secured for ourselves and those who come after us. To do that, we must educate our young people so they can comprehend the art that is left to them, and we must employ the artists who make it possible. It's the sacred responsibility of our leaders to see to it that we can.

Although I've probably heard it a dozen times in person in my life, my throat still catches with amazement when I hear the chorus join the orchestra in the finale to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. I'm simply stunned to be a member of the same species as someone capable of capturing such powerful emotions and relaying them for others to experience. I want to know, I need to know that future generations can have that same feeling.

So if we're ever trapped in an elevator together, you already know my answer to the question. Let's talk about something else, like what you thought of the Symphony's most recent concert.

See you at the hall!



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Moscow, St. Basil Cathedral

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE... AND DESPAIR

By Grant Llewellyn

Remember *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*? Those two iconic Russian words (“openness” and “rebuilding”) became a beacon of hope for so many of us in the West (I can only imagine what they could have meant for those in the East) during the Gorbachev era in the late 1980s. They were the two words ringing in my ears as a green 28-year-old conductor when I stepped off the plane in Moscow twenty years ago for my first visit to the former USSR to conduct orchestras in Kharkov, Ukraine and Irkutsk, Siberia. In those days everything Soviet went through Moscow. It was 1989 and I was met at the airport by Irina who was to be my faithful Party Watchdog for the duration of my stay. Now it’s twenty years on and Ekaterina greets me with a smile and a warmth that could never have been tolerated by the party back in the day.

We emerge from the airport into the Moscow traffic which is a topic I should get out of my system early on. It is simply hell on earth. The duration of any given journey has a variable of up to 1000%. I witnessed and suffered this uncertainty on a number of occasions. My journey to and from rehearsals took from ten minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes depending – (and there

didn’t seem to be any particular rush hour. You have a choice of twenty-four!).

The trip in from the airport took two and a half hours, but only thirty minutes on the way back. I once sat twenty minutes to go one hundred yards. As a musician I am perhaps not best qualified to assess urban planning, but when you have a population of ten million, most of whom now have cars, and you permit them to park at ninety degrees to the pavement on both sides of the street you cut down the available lanes for through traffic from four to one. Add to this the Muscovites’ apparent divine right to stop and double-park at any given place or time, in addition to the complete absence of any multi-story, single-story or any-story parking garages and then you have a recipe for gridlock.

While we’re on the subject of cars I must say that Moscow seems to have an extraordinary number of the largest SUVs on the market (eat your heart out Texas), and outstandingly the highest density of top-of-the-line Range Rovers (most with tinted windows) of any city in the world. It seems to be the vehicle of choice for wealthy Russians and combines the toughness and class that they desire. A sort of Hummer with style. There is a kind of

authoritarian anti-establishment feel to it all, or do I mean antidisestablishmentarianism?

There I’ve said it, and now I can get back to the love.

As a Welshman I was here to conduct the Moscow State Symphony in a program of Tango music by the Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla, performed by bandoneon and guitar soloists from Croatia. Go figure. This should be the ultimate mismatch on paper, and maybe it would be, but let’s start at the beginning.

DAY ONE

I rehearse the solo septet for the *Concierto de Nacar* (in addition to the bandoneon and guitar the piece calls for a string quintet, piano and drums). The full orchestra has been called away at the last minute by an invitation/summons to appear at the Kremlin. And who was I to deny Medvedev and Putin a little light relief from the affairs of state? In the interests of Russo-Welsh relations I didn’t object too strongly. I arrived to find a string quartet minus the viola (“but don’t worry, she’s really good”) and a piano. The drummer was arriving later. The cellist had no music, and when it



IT SIMULTANEOUSLY
SEDUCES
AND OFFENDS
THE SENSES.

arrived, he had clearly never seen it before in his life, nor did he seem able to dance the Tango. The drummer turned up eventually, took a further twenty minutes to set up, then declared that he was a rock drummer and proceeded to count off the rehearsal “a-one, two, three, four” before starting each time.

I had to point out that it was my prerogative to set the tempo, besides which the number four in Russian is *chtyryrie*, a beautiful word, but one that got in the way of any intended rhythm. I was encouraged by the violins, both of whom had an authentic Latin *braggadocio*; one was even called Mario, though he didn’t speak any Spanish when I tried him out. The pianist Mikhail was obviously running the show and proved to be the teacher of most of the players, taking pains to reassure me that everything would be just fine and that they really didn’t need to rehearse with the orchestra on day three, as was scheduled, because they all “needed to hear the bandoneon and guitar” who arrived on day four. I was not convinced and it also transpired that the elusive viola was not available on day three either (“but she is still really good”). I reflected on the way back to the hotel that I really needed them all at that rehearsal and told Katya (we were now on familiar terms).

In case you are all beginning to feel the despair more than the love I should tell you that I was staying at the most exquisite small hotel I have ever enjoyed. A discreet, luxurious palace, just around the corner from the Bolshoi and Red Square, which made one dizzy with thoughts of 19th century opulence and privilege. I almost felt guilty at this taste of Tsarist Russia from before the revolution. Almost.

DAY TWO

Undoubtedly the finest breakfast spread I have ever witnessed set me up for my first encounter with the orchestra. Orchestral musicians and conductors will tell you that the die is cast in the first few minutes of the first rehearsal and there is some truth in this belief. That being the case this relationship should have been a disaster. Within the first fifty bars of music, I found that the percussion had no parts, the bar numbers were wrong from bar 47 onwards, though only in some instruments, the first oboe had most of the clarinet part, and the double bass pages were back to front.

Add my dubious attempt to ascertain whether or not anybody understood a word I was saying and you can imagine the drama. Incredibly the orchestra did not seem too fazed by this. It evidently must happen all the time. I tried to lighten the mood by joking about last night’s football – Russia had narrowly failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup, being beaten 1-0 by Slovenia. But I don’t think they quite appreciated my Welsh humor.

My main concern was that the entire program required the orchestra to play an accompanying role, not something that any orchestra relishes let alone a proud Russian orchestra. Fortunately Piazzolla does occasionally give the musicians some musical meat to sink their Slavic teeth into, and so we were all able to let off some artistic steam. Nonetheless, it was a tough rehearsal and I vowed to shoot the publishers who had produced the parts and were presumably receiving a fee for their pathetic efforts. I made plans to set up a soloists’ rehearsal the following evening with bandoneon and guitar to be sure that we, at least were on the same page.

DAY THREE

Having been in L.A. the previous week I am slowly getting used to the eleven-hour time difference, which basically means that my 10am rehearsals start at 11pm the night before for my body clock. It is probably best not to think about it too much.

I am greeted in the lobby by a delightful vision in green who looks strangely familiar. This is Sdeniya, the twin sister of Katya and never were there two more lovely chaperones. Upon arrival at the rehearsal Katya appears with two bewildering pieces of information. Firstly, the entire solo septet had been fired, to be replaced by soloists from the orchestra, who had been duly informed of the decision. Whose decision? I dimly sensed the specter of totalitarianism again. Evidently, after I had insisted that the original septet turn up for today’s rehearsal as scheduled, it emerged that half of them had other gigs and so the orchestra director sacked them all.

I vaguely regretted never meeting the “talented” violist and I was not to see Mario ever again. The other news was that the bandoneon and guitar soloists, due in that afternoon from Croatia, had arrived at Zagreb airport to be told that their Lufthansa flights had been cancelled six months ago, and that they were rebooked on a flight leaving that evening,

arriving Moscow at 3am tomorrow morning. No one had told them. Typical German inefficiency. I was beginning to sympathize with Noel Coward’s immortal character “Senorita Nina from Argentina, despised the Tango, although she never was a girl to let a man go.” So much for our soloists’ rehearsal.

But not to worry, my mother and my Aunt Janet were arriving that evening and they would sort everything out!

DAY FOUR

I arrive early at the rehearsal expecting to find that everything had changed overnight, but lo and behold there were two Croats, bleary eyed on one hour’s sleep but ready and willing to talk and play Piazzolla. Miran Vaupotic (bandoneon) and Frane Kaupotac (guitar) are two very talented young musicians who are making quite a name for themselves in the Classical/Tango world. With the orchestra they were quick to appreciate the musical considerations (which were improving) and the orchestra applauded their heroic journey to be there and their stamina during the day.

Now that we are all present and correct let me dwell for a moment on the extraordinary world of Piazzolla. This is no ordinary tango music, but what the composer called “tango nuevo,” unmistakably tango but much harder hitting and spicier in every way. The difference between a capsicum and a jalapeno, or maybe even a habañero. They are all peppers after all. The Russians and Northern Europeans have a love affair with this music. Where else would you find sold out concerts of all Piazzolla besides Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Buenos Aires? It is not “easy listening” as was assumed in a television interview I conducted before the concert, but rather very “difficult listening,” with jarring rhythms, brutal dissonances, and underlying everything that irresistible, intoxicating Tempo de Tango. It simultaneously seduces and offends the senses. The bandoneon, though invented in Germany, is the chosen instrument of the tango and technically seems to me to be the Devil’s Instrument with a hellish pattern of keys on either side of the bellows for both hands to negotiate. It helps if you are some kind of contortionist, I think. Its close relation the accordion is, of course staple Russian fare, and Miran even used a Russian-made accordion (they manufacture the Rolls Royce of accordions) for one of the pieces, “Aconagua,” named for Argentina’s (and South America’s) highest mountain.

Sunday night in Moscow in late November with mum and aunt. Ira Gershwin would have asked “What to do, what to do, what to do? The outlook was decidedly blue,” but as there was no fog and it wasn’t London town, we went for a dinner cruise on the Moscow River. A delivery had just been made of six \$2 million ice-breaking river boats from Turkey and so we felt reassured as we tucked into our food that we stood a good chance of returning to port. That, and the fact that our boat was called Geronimo, and frankly there was no ice to be seen anywhere, not even in my vodka.

DAY FIVE

Dress Rehearsal. Finally I get into the Tchaikovsky Hall and reflect that I had spent the previous evening on the river in which Tchaikovsky had unsuccessfully attempted to drown himself towards the end of his life. I had a job to do however, and could not afford to be maudlin. This was the first and last chance I would have to work out the choreography of the show, the lay-out of the stage and the real balance challenges. The bandoneon and guitar needed to be amplified to have any chance of being heard. Miran and Frane had slept for sixteen hours and were raring to go.

The orchestra seemed to be finally finding the groove, though alarmingly there were still misprints and basic bowings being debated. We get to grips, for the first time, with the “Four Seasons of Buenos Aires” and I remember the time I had spent in the city on tour with the Boston Symphony. Forty-eight hours of the most exhausting and exhilarating activity I had ever experienced. The Porteños (named for the harbor area of Buenos Aires) seem able to dance all night without stop and then work all day, though I did fear for the Gross National Product. I managed it for forty-eight hours then collapsed on a plane to Caracas.

One of the rare redeeming features of the former Soviet Union was that the arts were made available to all through government subsidies. Concerts were packed with everyone from the poorest students to the most powerful politburo chiefs. I was anxious to see who would comprise the current Moscow audience, which was sold out at \$40 or \$50 a ticket. My mother and aunt disappointingly assured me that they were surrounded by the monied elite that night.





Peterhof Grand Palace



St. Petersburg, Spasa Na Krovi

BITTER, SWEET, WILD, ANGRY, MELANCHOLY, EXOTIC, EROTIC, DANGEROUS AND PASSIONATE, BUT NEVER SENTIMENTAL.

And so to the concert. Sergei appears from nowhere in my dressing room to declare he was an actor who was to present the concert and could I please tell him how to pronounce my surname. “Levelin” was the nearest I could get him to it and he disappeared in a waft of cologne only to reappear in costume dressed as a cross between a Russian sailor and Liberace. This apparently was *haute couture*, or maybe he was dressed for Nina. Remember “Nina from Argentina?” She married a “sailor, who had acquired a wooden leg in Venezuela, and she married him because he couldn’t dance.”

A television crew had also arrived and had no qualms about sticking their lights and cameras into every closet and corner uninvited. I am told that the results could be found on YouTube the next morning, but I dare not look.

Miran and Frane prove themselves to be first class artists and adjust and adapt to the orchestra, as it pushes and pulls in an attempt to find the Piazzolla groove. We eventually lock in, and it’s off to the world of the Tango. Bitter, sweet, wild, angry, melancholy, exotic, erotic, dangerous and passionate, but never sentimental. Can you feel the love?



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...&



David Hartman and Jodee Nimerichter

Dinner at Coquette

by David Hartman

Weekday afternoon rush hour. I-40 Durham to Raleigh is a parking lot. Going to be late. Hate being late, especially to dinner. Cell rings – can't answer – yeah am on the way. Would someone please explain the inner and outer beltline? Never mind. After over an hour, finally, there's the Six Forks Road exit, then left into North Hills. Bingo. Made it!

It was a chilly, breezy dusk in early December. Christmas lights twinkled around the mall. "The First Noel" filled our ears and warmed us from speakers unseen. A teen girl with a red Santa Claus hat and scarf flowing bounced into J.C. Penney. Christmas shopping season is in full swing.

There's the restaurant, Coquette – French. Cute name. Four fabulous artists are

about to meet and have dinner. This is the beginning of a North Carolina Symphony ritual that happens nearly two dozen times each year as guest artists and conductors descend on Raleigh, seemingly from nowhere, but, in truth, arrive from points north, south, east and west around the globe to join the orchestra for several rehearsals, then, usually, three performances at Meymandi Concert Hall and nearby communities. Then on Sunday the visitors, fresh from thrilling us with their extraordinary music, will disappear into the skies as magically as they arrived in early week.

But, this is just the start, the meeting of four people who have all arrived within the last few hours from many time zones away. They have never met each

other. Well, that's not exactly true. We can assume that two of them have met because they're married – to each other. That would be Pascal and Ami Rogé. They play the piano, sometimes the same one at the same time, at other times two pianos. He's French and for more than three decades has played the major music halls of the world. Ami was born in Japan and grew up in the United States. When you think, "French piano music," you think, "the Rogés," who have concertized together for many years, but were married just last spring, twice (more on that later). This week the Rogés will play Poulenc as the orchestra performs an evening of all French music. The Rogés arrived from recent appearances in Hong Kong, Rotterdam and England.

Across the table from the Rogés will be the brilliant and charismatic Music Director of the North Carolina Symphony, Welshman Grant Llewellyn. The high frequent flyer-mileage conductor just blew in from appearances in Los Angeles and Moscow with one night at home in Wales thrown in. And next to him is Jodee Nimerichter, Co-Director of the American Dance Festival, the six week international modern dance festival that begins its 73rd season at Duke this summer. Jodee and Grant are meeting each other and the Rogés for the first time.

Safe to say, given their recent travels, that all four are jet lagged. The clock on the wall says 7pm, but there's no telling where their body clocks are ticking, probably somewhere between droopy drowsy and confusion. As we headed to the table, Grant whispered to please forgive him if he nodded off with the appetizer. Actually, the energy that would develop around the table would make sure that could not happen, and it didn't. Good job, Grant. You stayed awake!

Something to start, a glass of wine and menus, in French. The very American waiter was charming and of good humor, but the poor guy was blind-sided by the fact that three of his four guests were French speakers. As the waiter methodically explained the menu, Pascal, especially, was pleased to not only pronounce the words in his beautiful French, but detail the culinary history of many of the dishes. Given the expectation of conversations about music, the tutorial on French cooking was an added treat with the waiter the most delighted.

Coquette's reputation is good and the food did not disappoint. The French dishes were, in the gushed words of my former colleague of many years back, the late Julia Child, "Yum!" (Julia taught me how to make many dishes, including omelettes, crepes and Rhode Island clam chowder. I'm grateful that, at the same time, she assured me in her familiar bubbling way of talking, that "cheffing" and cooking were not my calling. This, of course, came as no surprise to me. It's amazing, by the way, how much Julia sounds like Meryl Streep. But, I digress.)

With hungers satisfied and palates assuaged, the focus turned to music. So often, when people meet for the first time,

there is the warm-up, the get acquainted period as we size each other up – who's quiet or talky – who's naughty or nice, or both. Sometimes it all clicks or can fall flat. Well, this evening instantly became a romp of the smart, talented, urbane, unpretentious, wonderfully sensitive (where do I stop!) and fun! These four world-class artists, each so accomplished in his/her own field, playing at the top of their games, shared the thoughtful insights of people who are experienced, world-travelled and warmly confident in their own skins without being smug. As they sat face-to-face and elbow-to-elbow, energy enveloped the table like a swirling cloud. Each comment and observation kicked into the scrum of ideas kept the dialogue perking, at times, rockin'.

These four people are among a small minority who had the guts to follow their dreams and their passions, what they loved doing, making those passions into careers, despite knowing there were no guarantees and the roads would be long, disciplined, and at times, perhaps, painful. And this evening, at a nice dinner in North Carolina, their love of what they do and gratitude for their professional positions were on prominent display along with giant respect for each other. They were not like kids yelling, "Wow! I actually AM a pro ball player! How good does it get!" But, not far off.

A difficult challenge for performers (actors, dancers, musicians, conductors) is to explain, articulate for the rest of us what it is they actually do when performing and how they do it? (Many years back, I asked Jimmy Cagney that question about his acting. His answer was concise and clear. "Muh boy, I walk in, plant my feet, look the other guy in the eye and tell the truth.") Many, if not most, artists would not be so facile at explaining their craft and art, but Pascal took on the challenge.

Pascal: "I'm not very good at talking." With a wry smile and a twinkle in her eye Ami leaned in and gently intoned, "Yes, you are!" Pascal continued, "I find it difficult to put into words the emotions I feel when I play. Sometimes people want information, hear me talk about the music or what I am doing, but I never talk before my concerts. I want people to just close their eyes, listen and go with the experience. Many people tell me later that



THEY WERE NOT LIKE KIDS YELLING,
"WOW! I ACTUALLY AM A PRO BALL PLAYER!
HOW GOOD DOES IT GET!"

but, not far off.

it was an experience they'd never had before, that they were taken somewhere else."

Grant: "Sometimes, when there are certain characteristics of a piece that are not self evident, then a conductor or soloist might verbalize something from the stage. It can break down barriers, make the orchestra more accessible, but music is created, designed and conceived to speak for itself. Composers don't write music to be explained ahead of time."

Jodee: "The struggle for us in modern dance, a non-verbal art form, is trying to put into words what the experience will be for the audience. When I see a dance performance, I don't want a program. I just want to experience the show and leave with a 'feeling.' The question I ask myself is, 'how can I get dance to resonate for others?' Like all of you, I am extremely

These days fewer and fewer people are attending classical concerts than in the past. Two new studies reflect that, over the last twenty-five years, attendance is down 29% at classical music, opera, jazz, theater, even sports and other outdoor events. How concerned are our dinner mates?

Jodee points out that, for some reason, the ADF attendance over six weeks in Durham last summer actually rose last year, but she acknowledged that major ballet companies are trimming seasons and struggling. The modern dance companies, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Mark Morris Dance Group, Pilobolus Dance Theater and others are doing better, perhaps because they are better known and more cutting edge. Grant suggests that these modern companies cut across classical misconceptions, and that they're cool and sexy.

Grant: "I started this morning conducting a youth concert for some 1,500 fourth graders. At schools across the state, we perform forty to fifty concerts each year to 40,000 to 60,000 fourth graders, more than any other orchestra in America. When I actually started the Prelude to *Swan Lake* this morning the sheer sonic experience, the impact of that live orchestra on the kids in the lovely acoustic of Meymandi – these kids have never had a visceral thrill like it – there is nothing to touch it in the world of music. And even though I was jet-lagged I was thrilled and energized as well. This is the foundation, the first thing we can and must do – get kids in front of live music. Kids can download until the cows come home and plug their ears into iPods, but they will never get this experience with these electronic gadgets. No way. Many hundreds

the most charming, the most sparkling, the most brilliant, and the loudest – and your heart melts! It is pure entertainment, circus music with quality. If we could expose the human race to this piece we could convert 90% of them to classical music!"

Pascal: "Most of what we play is French music, which is colorful, based on sounds, colors and humor. It's light music and never profound. It is purely about enjoyment. Poulenc makes you laugh, makes you happy. Debussy makes you dream, disappear to somewhere else. For us it's a privilege to bring that to audiences. I am so privileged to be a pianist."

Besides being incredible musicians, it is difficult to describe just how charming the Rogés are in person, as a couple. When they decided to marry, with her family in Japan and their many friends in the United States,



Pascal Rogé and Grant Llewellyn



David Hartman and Grant Llewellyn



David Hartman, Ami and Pascal Rogé

THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF

good conversation,

good food AND

sparkle.

passionate about what I do. I could go to the theater 365 nights a year. But what is it about dance that resonates for me? What is it about me that makes me feel this way about dance? I can't explain it."

Again, very difficult to explain. But, back to artists explaining what they do and how.

Pascal: "I think conducting is the most elusive of all the arts. I don't understand how it works. I know you, Grant, must know the score, but how do you inspire people? How do you influence the music with a gesture for which there is no word? I am absolutely fascinated and glad that I never wanted to be a conductor, so I can talk about it without feeling frustrated."

Grant: "I'm not sure I understand it either. You do have to have a self-belief, even nerve and arrogance, to get up in front of eighty to one hundred highly qualified musicians and tell them what to do. And not letting that go to your head is a big challenge. Fortunately, I have four kids and a wife who smack me down to earth. 'Take out the garbage, Grant!'"

While Grant doesn't dispute the statistics, he says that his experiences of recent years don't reflect that reported 29% decline in attendance, neither at the North Carolina Symphony nor around the world.

Grant: "Last week I conducted in Moscow and the place was packed. I could hardly get tickets for my mother and aunt. And in Britain audiences are not significantly down."

Pascal: "When I started my career I was in my twenties and my audiences were fifty to seventy years old. The same is, generally, true today. It's partly generational, partly economic, perhaps, as people of this age can afford classical music. What saddens me is how difficult it is to attract young people to classical music in the Western world, unlike in Russia, China and Japan. In Japan half the audience is young people."

So, how to attract young people to classical music? Grant's conversation wattage spikes when he talks about trying to get kids inside the classical music tent and what a live exposure to the orchestra can mean to them.

of kids left that hall this morning stunned, excited and bewildered by the incredible physical, tangible, live sound, and they will take that with them. There's a chance that somewhere down the road some of them might say, 'Hey, why don't we go hear the symphony tonight? Remember that morning back in 2009?'"

Jodee: "At ADF we are also committed to getting children involved with dance. We do special shortened performances for them of pieces that will hold their interest and are doing more and more education programs. They use their own imaginations to actually choreograph their own dances. It's enlightening for them and a wonderful thing to watch unfold."

But, on to this week's program and Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos.

Grant: "This concerto is one of the most wonderful pieces of music ever written in terms of sheer entertainment. You have the pyrotechnics of two pianists playing together across the stage, the sheer fun and choreography of that. Poulenc's music is

the challenge was how to have a wedding that all might attend. No problem. Do it twice. The first, a traditional Japanese wedding in Shimonoseki, Japan, in March 2009. Then, for their American friends, at the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas, in a gondola! Fun, anyone?"

The conversation could go on deep into the night, but tomorrow is a workday. Jodee and Grant agree to explore how the American Dance Festival and the Symphony might be able to join forces for a joint project one day, and Jodee will attend rehearsal this week to hear the Rogés and some French ballet music that's also on the program.

Grant mentions that Poulenc was incorrigible, an outrageous guy he wished could have joined us for dinner. Poulenc probably would have brought some sparkle to the evening, but there was no shortage of good conversation, good food and sparkle. Rehearsal tomorrow at 2pm. "Sleep wells" were shared all around. To the sleds, one and all, and to all a good night!



ALL STARS *in the House*

In late September 2009, seventy talented young musicians auditioned for the North Carolina Symphony Young All Stars, an exclusive new chamber orchestra for advanced high school musicians, led by its Music Director Grant Llewellyn. Forty-four were selected and two concerts were planned for the group's first year, one in December 2009 and a second in April 2010. Join Opus as we observe the All-Star's first outing of rehearsals and performance with Grant.



A bleak, wet night in early December. Cinematic rain and wind. Dark figures jumping puddles, instrument cases in arms, heads down against the elements, running towards Meymandi Concert Hall. All could be home in fleecy sweats clutching mugs of steaming soup. Instead, on this night unfit for man or beast, stars are about to be born.

By Jeannie Mellinger
Photos by Alan Schueler





Kathryn Gilger



Grant Llewellyn gets a smile out of Emily Telford-Marx and Drake Driscoll
Photo: Michael Zirkle



Bryan Hansen, Samantha Song and Emily Telford-Marx

Inside the hall, evergreen garlands provide a festive ambience. At the podium, North Carolina Symphony Music Director Grant Llewellyn. On the stage, forty-four garden-fresh high school students with instruments, keen for what is coming next.

“Good evening,” says Grant, all warmth on a cold night. “Consider this the official handshake. Let’s make this a true two-way process tonight. We have members of the orchestra here on stage with us – use them as resources.” He turns to the serious-looking young concertmaster to his left. “Give us the A, please.” They begin.

Grant stops them a few bars into Beethoven’s Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op. 21. There are some rhythm problems. They begin again. And another stop. “One of the things I most enjoy,” Grant tells them, “is cycling. In Wales, we sometimes cycle in big groups with people of all ages. Even the little ones never get lost. They keep up. That’s the level I need. Don’t get lost.”

Point taken. There is a perceptible shift in the room’s atmosphere. The players look stronger, sit straighter, and almost uniformly adopt the same expression of

resolve and concentration. Not. Going to. Get. Lost.

Yet, they are halted again. “Principal strings,” Grant says, “you have an enormous job to do and that is to move. If you don’t move, you are not needed. You must lead your section with your movements. Your gestures must be larger than life. Have you been to the North Carolina Symphony?” Many nods. “Good. Watch and emulate Bonnie Thron, our Principal Cellist. Watch how she leads her section with her gestures and movements.”

Grant is coach, teacher, enthusiast, critic, big brother, supporter, reviewer, evaluator, taskmaster. Young and therefore inexperienced, this group has not played together before, but they gradually rise to Grant’s assumption that they can achieve what he wants.

Later, away from the group, Grant talks about the difference between working with students and professionals. “There are really no significant differences in the way I work with this group of young musicians and the way I work with the North Carolina Symphony or any other orchestra. Certainly there are aspects

of technique and method that must be addressed with the All Stars that I take for granted with professional musicians. But I expect preparation, I expect them to have listened to the music, I expect them to understand technique. This group is fantastically motivated; their learning curve is almost vertical.”

Among the All Stars, the Symphony Stars are scattered. Assistant Concertmaster Karen Strittmatter Galvin whispers in the young concertmaster’s ear. Principal Cellist Bonnie Thron sits on the floor near the cellists, pulling them together with one hand gesture. In the back row, Principal Timpani John Feddersen has some advice about the triangle. Assistant Principal Clarinet Mike Czewski leans close to the woodwinds, offering suggestions. Over the course of the next rehearsals, others will offer their experience and advice: Associate Principal Viola David Marschall, Associate Principal Cello Liz Beilman, Principal Clarinet Jimmy Gilmore, Principal Percussion Rick Motylinski, French Horn Rachel Niketopoulos.

“Very good,” says Grant, as they finish a movement. To the concertmaster he

notes, “Good leadership. You got 75% of them to go with you that time. Again, all together now, one before G.”

Noticeable improvement. The All Stars are listening across the orchestra now. You can hear it in the music.

It doesn’t last. Grant is kind, but he is cutting them no slack, and he halts things again. “I’ve lost most of the orchestra. Let’s cure ourselves of the tendency to play a difficult passage more quickly. Believe me, this is an impulse the world over. If you mess up (and we all do), be quick to realize it and quick to fix it. I’ll forgive anything, but I’m less sympathetic if you mess up and stick to it. Listen to your section. Be aware if you’re not with them. All right now, *mezzo forte*, come on! Let your hair down. Let’s really lock in, please.”

In spite of Grant’s exacting demands, he always has a smile and perhaps a gentle joke that relaxes everyone. The enthusiasm he exudes is both palpable and compelling. The musicians seem less tentative than they did at the beginning – perhaps beginning to understand what Grant wants and believing they can deliver it.

George Telford has two daughters among the All Stars. “I was impressed by

Llewellyn’s easy manner and by how comfortably he connected with the musicians,” he says. “It was also impressive how quickly, without brow-beating, he was able to bring together a very fine performance in a very short rehearsal time. My girls got a taste for what it might be like to be a world-class musician in a world-class concert hall, with world-class leadership. This felt real.”

At the rehearsal break, most of the All Stars stay on the stage, talking in small groups, asking questions of the Symphony coaches, practicing runs, fingering and bowing, changing reeds, tightening drums. They look like any group of adolescents in their hoodies, purple flip-flops, ponytails and jeans. They slouch and laugh and sometimes look a little awkward as they chat and get to know each other.

But when they pick up their instruments, everything changes. The serious posture returns, the intense concentration. These young musicians are being challenged and they know it. Concertmaster Roman Lin says, “the music was difficult to play well and it was hard to keep up with the conductor’s demands. Reading the notes on the page constitutes only 30% of the

performance. The other 70% comes from watching the conductor and each other.”

Principal second violinist Victoria Pedroza describes the experience as “inspiring, exhilarating, intense and rewarding. I was really surprised at the high level we were able to reach. It was a lot of fun, but still involved a serious and intense environment for us to play in.”

The second half of the rehearsal ends as it began. Grant knows what he wants and he is determined to get it, prodding his already competent players forward inch by inch as he instructs them, sometimes pointedly. No coddling.

*Woodwinds, can you project more?
Trumpets, I want to hear Bah! Bah! Bah!
Not a long sustained note.*

*Please make the dotted movement dotted.
No lazy triplets.*

*You’re falling into the demi-semi quaver
and that’s a very dangerous place.*

*That was awful, what happened there?
Do you have a G natural? You played a
G-sharp a couple of times.*

*Harmonically, we’re at sixes and sevens
right here. There’s a lot going on and you
should be watching me.*



Wyatt Coleman

This is Wednesday. There are just four more hours of rehearsal on Saturday, and two more on Sunday morning before the concert.

“It was amazing to see the progress we made in only four rehearsals,” says Drake Driscoll, principal cellist. “What a wonderful experience it was to work with a great conductor like Maestro Llewellyn. I learned how to take in everything that he said in a short amount of time and then incorporate it into the music.”

Says Llewellyn, “The All Stars quickly bonded as a group – this is such an important part of music-making. The music is intimidating enough by itself without pitting your limitations against your contemporaries. Translating the talent we heard in the auditions into an orchestral ensemble is an enormous leap of faith. The virtuoso part is easy. Awareness is harder.”

A cold and cloudy Sunday afternoon, ETC Auditorium at the North Carolina School of Science and Math. The first performance of the Young All Stars is about to begin. It is surprisingly quiet backstage as the musicians get out their instruments and prepare themselves for the concert. There is no

talking. Only whispers. Once on stage they are tuning, business-like in their black and white. Through the cacophony of bowing, tooting and tapping, you can pick out various phrases of the afternoon’s selections: the Beethoven and Karel Husa’s *Sinfonietta*.

The performance of *Sinfonietta* is a U.S. premiere. Composer Karel Husa, born in Czechoslovakia and now living in Cary, NC, is one of the great contemporary musical luminaries. *Sinfonietta* is one of his first significant works and in spite of having been written in the shadow of World War II, has a jolly and light-hearted feel. At the first rehearsal, Grant teased that *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe* would cover the premiere, but it actually is a tremendous privilege and a very big deal for these young musicians to be introducing the work to its first American audience.

“As a young musician, I usually have music markings and other recordings to help me hear my part, hear how it fits in and hear the piece as a whole,” says principal harpist Alicia Reid. “With this piece I did not have that luxury. And yet, as we began our rehearsals, I was struck by the beauty of the music. It quickly became one of my favorite orchestral pieces I’ve ever played.”

Pedroza notes, “I love the *Sinfonietta* more each time I play it. The colors that the music brings out of the orchestra are beautiful as well as exciting, and all the other parts woven into the piece make it difficult, but a very rewarding experience to play. After the rehearsal, I found myself walking out humming the melody.”

Husa, who was unable to attend the concert, says “I must confess that I could not have performed this composition when I was their age. The *Sinfonietta* is challenging even to professional orchestras and time is needed to absorb the technical challenges, as well as some unpredictable or unusual turns of melodies and harmonies. And at the same time we have to listen also to what others are playing.

“It is like visiting a new city: you have to walk the streets and look ahead and around, in order to familiarize yourself with the new environment. It takes time. The next visit is easier and the next one even more and you start to be familiar with the city. This is how we learn.

“I am grateful to Maestro Llewellyn for programming my young composition for this first concert of the Young All Stars, and am grateful to all performers for learning

It's been a *fascinating process*, and we have traveled a long way.

and understanding all the thousands and thousands of notes in the *Sinfonietta*!”

Those thousands and thousands of notes did prove ultimately too daunting for this first concert. “I have some good news and some bad news,” Grant tells the audience after the orchestra performs the first movement of the *Sinfonietta*. “Our work together has been intentionally intensive. We have postponed playing the second and third movements for you, because the work is very complex. So the bad news is that you will have to come back to hear the whole thing. But the good news is that we have decided to play the first movement twice so that you can hear it and enjoy it again.”

Says Llewellyn, “We may have bit off more than we could chew. But it’s a start. The greatest strength of this group is their learning potential. It’s been a fascinating

process, and we have traveled a long way. And for me, working with these young people is liberating. They do not come with pre-set expectations of how a piece should be played or a deeply engrained performance tradition that is hard to let go of. They are learning it all for the first time.”

The concert ends with an exuberant performance of the Beethoven. Grant conducts with gusto. The principals move and gesture to their sections, the trumpets sound *Bab! Bab! Bab!* as desired, the woodwinds project, the dotted movements are dotty. If there was any demi-semi quavering, it was not noticeable and as for G-sharps where there should have been G-naturals, this audience was too mesmerized by the amazing performance of these talented young players to have noticed anything other than the power of their music.

As for the Young All Stars themselves, they can hardly wait for the spring, when they will all meet and play together with Grant again. “Words can’t truly describe what a wonderful opportunity and learning experience the North Carolina Symphony has provided to us young musicians,” says Pedroza. “I felt extremely privileged to be working with Maestro Llewellyn and the other symphony musicians who helped us out over the weekend. They are the true All Stars whom I look up to, with the wonderful example and inspiration they give to us in their love of music.”

When they come together again, the city will be more familiar, as Mr. Husa said. They’ve walked the streets, they know the environment. The visit will be easier. The path will be clear. Because this is how we learn everything.





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ON THE AIR

by Amy Russell



David Hartman warms up for the mic



Amy Russell



Peter Bombal

“Welcome to Meymandi Concert Hall and the North Carolina Symphony – in concert. I’m David Hartman.”

While I hate to dispel the myth, if it exists, David Hartman’s signature opening line is actually a little white lie. He isn’t broadcasting live from the concert hall, although we do hope to work some radio magic to make it come across that way. In fact, the North Carolina Symphony broadcast usually doesn’t hit the air waves until a few weeks or even months after the concert.

There are many people involved in creating each North Carolina Symphony radio show. I’m the Associate Producer for the series and I’ll give you a backstage pass and walk you through the whole process that leads up to a broadcast, from the downbeat of the dress rehearsal all the way to, “...and I’m David Hartman. Make it a good evening.”

The Interviews

The interview process really begins at the start of each Classical series dress rehearsal. Our radio host and broadcaster extraordinaire, David Hartman, settles into a seat (usually in a box or the choir loft) to hear the music he’ll discuss later with that week’s conductor and soloist. At about the same time, our sound engineer Dwight Robinett sets up his gear backstage and by the dressing rooms, preparing to record the concerts and interviews. Dwight is a true Renaissance man – he is not only our engineer, but also our Assistant Principal Trombone.*

At the end of the rehearsal, there is a flurry of activity on stage with orchestra musicians packing up their instruments and asking last-minute questions of the conductor. David is usually in that mix, too, introducing himself to the soloist and saying hellos to orchestra players. Then, we – David, myself, the conductor and the soloist – make our way to a dressing room, one level down, where our stage crew has developed an ingenious system of ropes, clips and hi-tech cutting-edge acoustic panels (okay, they’re really just moving blankets, but they do the trick!) to transform the room into a suitable recording environment.

David takes his seat in the dressing room, directly across from the first interviewee, usually our soloist for the week. He begins with some pre-taping chatter: tell me about your family, where are you from, have you worked with this conductor before, etc. This helps Dwight to set the audio levels and also loosens up the guest for a relaxed conversation. David has an ebullient personality and

natural curiosity about everything, and it is a testament to his years at the top of the business that he can so quickly make a connection with anyone and everyone. Once Dwight gives the okay, David launches into the interview, covering the artist’s career, the week’s rehearsals, the repertoire and so on. Dwight and I sit just outside, in the hallway, and listen in on headphones to monitor sound quality. After about fifteen minutes, David thanks the guest, who then usually heads back to the hotel for some rest before that night’s concert, or up to the stage to do a little private practice.

The interview with the conductor, usually with Grant Llewellyn, who has been patiently (and quietly) waiting in an adjoining dressing room, is next. We launched our broadcast series in Grant’s first season, 2004-2005, so by this point, David and Grant have spent hours and hours together in the interview setting and they have an easy and joyful way of talking about music, just like old friends.

After the conductor's interview, Dwight gives me a CD of the audio files, and we all shake hands and head our separate ways; for me, that means back to the Symphony offices to begin work on the podcast which will be your first chance to hear these great conversations. You can download the podcasts on our website (www.ncsymphony.org).

The Podcast

Twenty minutes later and I'm back at my desk, booting up Adobe Audition, our digital editing software that I'll use to create the podcast. Listening to the podcast is a great way to get the inside scoop on the week's rehearsals, the personality of the guest artists and their unique perspective on the repertoire. I don't edit very much out of the podcast interviews, so those are usually longer and a bit more colorful than the versions that end up in the final radio broadcast. I might snip a few "um"s and "er"s and a throat clearing here and there, but that's the extent of the workload before the interviews are posted on the website. Look for them around 4pm on the Thursday before every Classical series concert.

The Music

The next evening, Dwight is backstage listening through his headphones as the stage fills with musicians, the hall fills with patrons and the conductor takes the stage. He tapes the entire evening, including almost an hour's worth of audience noise – I'll use that ambience later to fill in behind David's voiceover during the broadcast. Next time you are in Meymandi Concert Hall at around 7:45pm on a Classical concert night, look up above the stage and you will see a few small black microphones stealthily hung from the ceiling. You're going to be on the radio!

Immediately after Saturday's performance, Dwight produces a couple of CDs to pass on to the members of our Artistic Advisory Committee. This is a group of orchestra musicians who have been elected by their peers to consult with the Music Director regarding artistic matters, such as exactly which recordings make it into the radio broadcast. Dwight drops off another set of recordings of the concerts at the office a day or two later and I load them onto my PC and send the files to our guest artist for approval and comments.

Fourth Horn, Rachel Niketopoulos is the current Chair of the Artistic Advisory Committee and she gets feedback from the rest of that group after they have reviewed the

recordings. I receive their final editing notes a few weeks before each broadcast. Sometimes their response is simply, "Use the first movement of the Brahms from Friday and the rest from Saturday." But, occasionally it is more complicated, like, "Take measures 4 through 38 from Friday in the second movement. Take out the audience cough during the violin solo at five minutes thirteen seconds in the first movement," and so on. The artist and conductor contact me at about the same time with their preferences. All is taken into account and the editing is completed.

The Script

I love writing these scripts. I get to spend a few hours a week pretending I am back in college, among the stacks and practice rooms in Hill Hall. (I spent many happy days earning my music degree at UNC-Chapel Hill.) The idea behind each script is to give structure to the broadcast – announcing the program, providing what we call intros and outros for each piece of music, and giving biographical information on the conductor and soloist. The script is also our chance to give the audience some perspective on why the music is important and why we chose the pieces we did. I usually begin with facts about the composer's life, when the piece was written and why, critical reactions, and the composer's influence or place in the evolution of orchestral music. If there is a strong programmatic link between the works, I'll talk about that, too, which lets listeners in on the conductor's thinking behind programming each concert. I use many sources when researching, including our program notes by Dr. Richard Rodda, the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, judicious use of Wikipedia and a number of trusty tomes like Michael Steinberg's *The Concerto*, *The Symphony*, and *Choral Masterworks* and Harold C. Schonberg's *Lives of the Great Composers*.

There is another trick to writing these scripts: they have to sound like David Hartman. While he is the first to say that he is not a musical scholar, he does have extensive experience singing in choirs and musical theatre productions as well as lifelong and deep respect for the art form. I've got to strike that balance in the words I craft for him. David is a great writer himself and has taught me so much about writing for radio. My first scripts for him were dense and academic and, well, dull, but I am proud to say that I think I have graduated from the Hartman School of Broadcasting with flying colors, and now we work together

like a well-oiled machine. (It probably helps that I shut my office door and read the scripts aloud in my best David Hartman voice before I ever send them his way. I can do a decent imitation of his cadence and ad-libs – totally out of respect for the man, of course!)

The Voiceover

Once I finish the script, I spend some time with the Symphony's VP for Artistic Operations and General Manager Scott Freck, reading through it and making any necessary changes. Scott is also the Executive Producer of the radio broadcast series. Then I email the script to David on the Friday afternoon before our voiceover recording session the following Monday. On that Monday morning, David and I meet in the conference room at WUNC-FM in Durham to talk through the script and make any changes that he recommends.

Next, we head into the studio to meet up with WUNC-FM's Technical Production Supervisor Peter Bombar. David takes his seat in the recording booth, and on the other side of the glass, I'm seated behind Peter, in the production booth. David puts on his headphones and does a test read of the first paragraph while Peter checks the levels. Peter gives us the go-ahead and David begins to read the script. While David is reading, I watch the time code on the recording and list it, along with my notes, next to the start of each take on my script. That way, I will be able to quickly find the bits of the recording I want to use when I start to build the show later. It usually takes us about forty-five minutes to record the script, with stops and starts to correct pronunciation and to get different takes in different moods – I produce the session by speaking to David using an intercom system piped right into his headphones. Those forty-five minutes also usually include a few breaks for telling stories, giving our renditions of scenes from Mel Brooks movies and general joking around. We keep it pretty light-hearted and all of the fun is recorded – I could make a great blooper reel one day!

Once we feel we've got a great take of each bit of the script, David comes into the booth to wait with us as the session is burned onto a CD. We all chat, catching up on family, work, Peter's motorcycle business, David's next adventure in broadcasting. (He's always hosting panels of astronauts or Nobel Prize winners somewhere, poor guy.) Once the CD is ready, I have the final piece of the puzzle that I need to create our broadcast.

The Build

Later that week, I take all of the audio material we've gathered – the interviews, the music, the voiceover – edit each individual piece and then put it all together. The best comparison to building the broadcast that I can think of is quilt-making. Each sound file is like one patch for the quilt, and they all get stitched together into what Adobe Audition calls a multi-track session. You add each piece into the session, move it around to perfect the timing and adjust the volume, either as a whole or fading in and out. I've just made it sound much simpler than it is – the whole process takes hours to complete. I create two sessions: one for the first half of the program and another for the second half, a.k.a. Reel One and Reel Two.

Once I feel like the show is just how I want it, I take it to Scott and we listen through it together to do any final tweaking. After that, I mix the two reels down into one audio file each – from that patchwork stage into something that is more like one solid piece of cloth. I burn those files onto CDs and send them to WUNC-FM's Operations Manager and Producer Patty Painter-Wakefield in Chapel Hill.

The Broadcast

We aim for a total broadcast length of one hour and fifty-eight minutes. Of course, it's hard to be that precise every time, so if we come up a little short I'll suggest a complementary commercial recording for Patty to throw in after our program airs. For example, one recent broadcast included the orchestra performing Liszt's Mephisto Waltz. That piece is heard more often in performance on solo piano, so I suggested to Patty that she air pianist Gabriela Montero's recording of the same work right after our show to fill out the time slot.

So, there you have it: all of our secrets revealed. Now that you are in-the-know, please set your dial to 91.5 WUNC-FM at 8pm on the last Monday of every month. Whether you are driving on I-40, eating dinner at your kitchen table or jogging on the greenway, we'll transport you over the airwaves and right into Meymandi Concert Hall, where you can relive a great performance you heard in person or you can catch up on one that you may have missed.



*Editor's note: Dwight retires at the end of the 2009-2010 season after 35 years as the orchestra's Assistant Principal Trombone.

Thanks for listening!

I want to acknowledge all of the other brilliant people who take part in making these broadcasts happen. Allyn Love, our Director of Operations, is a music history whiz and writes and edits some of our broadcasts. When David Hartman is unavailable, we often turn to Catherine Brand or David Brower from the WUNC-FM staff to fill in as interviewers. We also work with engineers Robin Copley, David Wright and Al Wodarski when recording our voice-over sessions. Rachel Niketopoulos is joined on the Artistic Advisory Committee by Karen Galvin and Mary Boone. And, of course, we couldn't bring these great broadcasts without our sponsor Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina.

Amy Russell

Director of Artistic Programs and Partnerships



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MEET *Sarah* HICKS

Sarah Hicks joined the North Carolina Symphony as Associate Conductor in the 2009-10 season, bringing to the orchestra her sharp and vibrant musicianship, extensive conducting experience and eclectic musical taste. Blair Tindall at The New York Times noticed her talent in 2005, acknowledging her place in “the next generation of up-and-coming American conductors.” With additional posts as Principal Conductor of Pops and Presentations for the Minnesota Orchestra and Staff Conductor at the Curtis Institute of Music, Sarah’s schedule couldn’t be busier, but she still manages to have a fascinating life.

LISTEN IN WITH OPUS AS WE GET TO KNOW OUR NEWEST CONDUCTOR.

BORN IN:

Tokyo. We moved to Hawaii when I was two years old. I tell people it's because my dad was from California, my mom from Japan and Hawaii is right in the middle. I went to a French school and I spoke Japanese, but apparently at four or five I didn't speak English so they thought there was something wrong with me.

THE PATH TO THE PODIUM:

I started on piano at about five. I was one of those serious kids, so I was practicing a lot and playing with orchestras by the time I was twelve. I have tiny hands, so I overused them and I started having arm and hand problems. By the time I was 17, they told me I would have to quit and do physical therapy. I was so depressed because piano had been my focus for twelve years, but my dad said, "Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You can still hold a baton."

THE AUDITION:

I went to my orchestra teacher and asked him if he thought I could try conducting. He said sure, handed me his baton and left to take a half-hour phone call. The piece was Dvořák's 8th Symphony (yes, I went to a really good high school). And that was when I decided I wanted to be a conductor.

BEYOND HAWAII:

There was no performance degree at Harvard – they are much too serious and academic – so I got a composition degree. But I performed a lot – there were three opera companies and five orchestras. After that, I spent a year studying in Prague. I didn't know anyone and I could not speak Czech except to order beer and cheese or ask, "When is the last train?" Then I went to the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and got my advanced conducting degree. I got my first job while I was still in school as assistant conductor of the Reading Symphony and I've been working ever since.

IS CONDUCTING A MAN'S WORLD?:

At Curtis, I studied with a very old-school German teacher. He would say very provocative things about women – I don't know if he was trying to toughen me up or if he meant what he said. He didn't have a lot of female students. I went to Korea years ago where they had literally never even thought of a woman conductor, but if you

know what you are doing, musicians will follow you and respect you even if they feel uncomfortable with a gender they aren't used to working with. It should not be an issue if you can work together.

BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING:

There have been instances in which I felt I was being patronized a little – maybe that a younger, male colleague was being treated in a slightly different way. To some degree, conducting is an old boys' club. You just have to learn to speak the language and to prove that you won't take guff from anyone. I'm a very straightforward person and I can't be anything but a woman. There was a time that I presented myself in a bit more masculinized way – I had short hair and I wore suits, but I realized that was disingenuous. So now I have long hair and I like to wear sparkly outfits and totally high heels because, why not? That's part of the fun of being this gender.

BEST THING ABOUT THE JOB:

The sense that there is a symbiotic relationship among everyone on stage. The best musical moments happen when everyone is feeling it – the capital "I," existential, mystical, big It. When it happens we all know it and the audience knows it and those are the connections that make the world go around and make life worth living.

WORST THING ABOUT THE JOB:

Two things. Traveling is hard. I love going to new places and meeting new people but it takes a toll on you, on your physical well-being and your personal life. The second thing is that music is so personal. More than any job, musicians tend to take criticism personally. It's hard to remove yourself from the personal investment you have as a musician to create something larger than yourself, which is an orchestral performance.

PERSONAL YODA:

My old-school German teacher. He is one of the finest musical minds I've ever known. His way of analyzing music so you can parse it down to its smallest component and then build it up again is extraordinary. I studied with him for three years. As a result I'm not afraid of any piece of music. I know how to learn music in a way very few people understand. I'm grateful to him for that.

FIRST LOVE:

I was seven when I heard Chopin's F minor Ballad. It's the densest of the ballads and maybe the most impenetrable. I don't know why that affected me but it was so dense and complicated. When you're a kid and starting to become a person you feel all dense and conflicted, and it really resonated with me. I eventually learned to play it. It won me a piano competition when I was 14.

GREATEST MISCONCEPTION ABOUT CLASSICAL MUSIC:

That it's elitist. Most musicians that I know are really open and enjoy lots of different types of music. They are focused on their craft, but they go to clubs and listen to all kinds of things. Music exists in every culture and is important in every culture and we are just performing a particular kind of music. I wish there were better ways to break down those barriers.

ON HER IPOD:

It could be anything – it could be Broadway, it could be Eminem – I have several thousand things on my iPod. I like to put it on shuffle and see what pops up. It could be Tom Waits and then Schoenberg, how cool is that? I like to keep up on the current culture end of rock – like the Dirty Projectors or Grizzly Bear. I need to know what people listen to and where are we going culturally. I listen to Top 40 too, because I want to see which Britney Spears song is up there now at number two. It's irresponsible not to keep up with popular culture – movies, TV shows, all of it.

ALWAYS IN THE FRIDGE:

Lots of things – Greek yogurt, asparagus, a bottle of white wine and sriracha – spicy thai red pepper sauce which goes on anything and everything. Those are the staples. And bacon, because bacon goes with everything.

FANTASY CAREER:

I would want to be a Food Network chef. I'd love to be Anthony Bourdain, for instance, and do a traveling cooking show.

TECHNOLOGY ITEM SHE CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT:

My laptop. My schedule is there, all my scripts are there. It's how I keep in touch with people. I have composing software so when I'm arranging I have everything I need. I can't imagine what I did before.

I NEED TO KNOW WHAT PEOPLE LISTEN TO**AND WHERE WE ARE GOING**

culturally.

GUILTY PLEASURE:

MTV and reality shows. *The Hills*, *The City*, it's bad. I've even watched Tila Tequila. I just think sometimes your brain needs to have a whole bucketful of candy and I love that.

PERFECT DAY:

Preferably some place beautiful – on a beach or in the Alps somewhere. There would be great food. There would be a hike or a swim or dive – just being with my husband and our dogs Bamsa and Sieglinde. My favorite thing in the world, though, is going out after a concert, so my perfect day would have to involve a concert. I like to bring people back to my place where I'll have a huge spread, or go out to a lovely restaurant that serves late and have a great meal and some drinks. There's something about that period when you're done with this very intensive work that you just feel an incredible sense of release. And it doesn't last until the next morning so you have to take advantage of it.

PERSON IN HISTORY SHE WOULD LOVE TO BE ABLE TO MEET:

Lady Murasaki, who wrote *The Tale of Genji* which I think was not just the first Japanese novel, but the first novel in history. And it's written by a woman! What prompted her to do this? I'd love to get into someone's head who is from a very different era where it was unthought of to do something like that. And also to ask how she came up with this incredibly racy story!

MOST UNDERRATED COMPOSERS:

Haydn and Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn wrote some of the most extraordinary and exquisite music and it's well-constructed too. I think he's not given credit where it's

due. The level of creativity and the quirky humor in Haydn – it's incredibly sophisticated, especially from an aesthetic and a music theory standpoint.

OBSESSION:

I am obsessed with cows. I know I'm anthropomorphizing, but they are so big and dumb and there's an innocence about them that is lacking in the world right now. I have a cow flashlight, a cow shoulder massager, cow creamers, cow humidifier, stuffed cows and even a cow-b-que – a barbeque in the shape of a cow. I admit there's something really wrong about that.

JUGGLING ACT:

I couldn't do it without having a husband who, at least for now, stays at home. He quit his job with the Richmond Symphony in order to move with me to Minnesota. You have to have a support system and he's a great support system.

RECURRING NIGHTMARE:

There is a concert, and I have to sing. This is an operatic concert and I don't understand why I am singing but the funny thing is that I get on the stage and I take a deep breath and I can sing. So it's not really a nightmare. I usually wake up about a minute into the singing and think wow, I'm such a great singer. But I never get to enjoy it – the time leading up to the singing feels like hours and hours of agonizing.

GARAGE BAND DIVA:

I did sing in a garage band a few years ago with a bunch of classical musicians. We all played different instruments – there was a keyboard, electric cello, electric violin, drum set, bass. I wrote

songs with my husband. He played the guitar and I sang – we just had fun with it. It came from the idea that it would be easy to write a pop song. You have four chords, some words about love or breaking up and you can write a pretty decent pop song. We were Cow Path 40 – after a rural road in Vermont where we all met one summer.

PERFORMANCE RITUALS:

After a performance, I have to take off my shoes. I wear four-inch heels so I take them off right away. But I'm not one of those people that has to shut the door and focus. When I get to the hall, I'm ready to go.

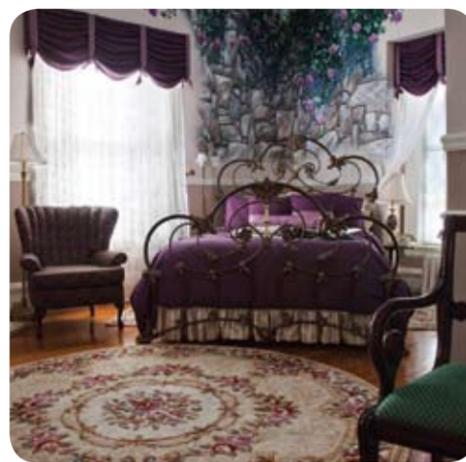
WAVES OF THE FUTURE:

I'm very much a Pops person, which is why I got this job in Minnesota. I think it's a large part of the future of orchestras, deciding what to do with that part of their offerings, figuring out which artists cross over in an interesting way, and developing new audiences. There is a lot of potential there so that's an area I'm really interested in.

ANYTHING YOU'VE ALWAYS WISHED SOMEONE WOULD ASK YOU IN AN INTERVIEW BUT THEY NEVER HAVE?

You have to find a way to keep some things for yourself, Conductors lead, more than other types of musicians, very public lives. It's nice to be anonymous, sometimes. So they should ask, "What's the one thing we shouldn't know about you?" And I would say, "Well, you'll never find out!"





Bartók's Retreat

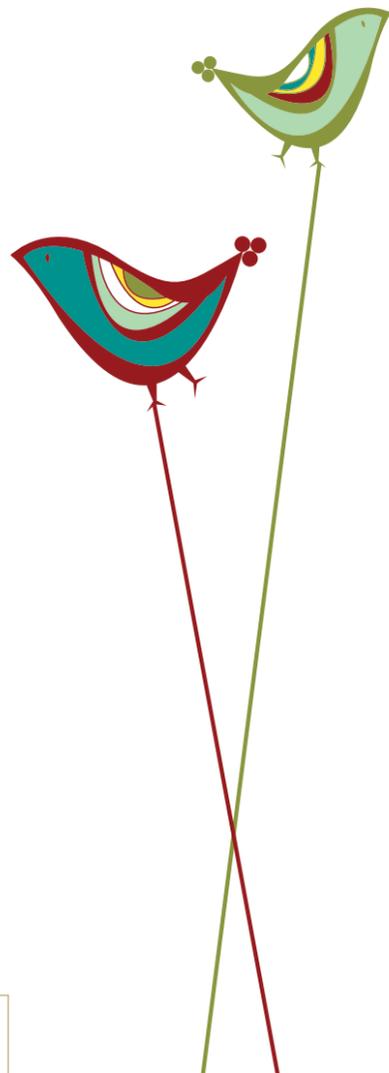
by Jimmy J. Gilmore
Photos by Jess Levin

It was a modest, somber crowd of perhaps ten people that gathered at Ferncliff Cemetery on the afternoon of September 28, 1945. The group was unusual because almost everyone in attendance was a musician, and all were present to honor the great Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók, who had died two days earlier at Westside Hospital in New York. Word that Bartók had died of leukemia spread quickly in the music world and was no surprise to many who knew that he had been in failing health for several years. Also well known were the difficult economic circumstances that Bartók and his wife, Ditta, had faced since coming to America in 1940. Like many Europeans who sought refuge in this country during World War II, the Bartóks struggled to find enough work to sustain even a modest standard of living.

Even before he knew the true extent of his illness, Bartók had requested a simple, non-religious funeral. And this was simple to be sure; there wasn't even a gravestone. He was buried in Plot St. Peter, Grave #470. Perhaps this would not have bothered Bartók, but so little ceremony and such a humble burial seemed an unfitting farewell to a composer of his stature. Bartók was shy and sensitive, but at the same time a proud and exacting man who stood firmly by his principles. He steadfastly refused to accept charity of any sort. However, his musician friends and organizations such as the Association of Composers, Authors and

Publishers (ASCAP) made sure that the composer had some gainful employment. The Ditson Fund, a foundation set up to aid artists, gave Bartók a grant to catalogue Columbia University's collection of eastern European folk music. Also, he received a significant commission from Serge Koussevitsky and the Boston Symphony to compose his greatest and best loved orchestral work, the Concerto for Orchestra. Bartók was never comfortable in America, no doubt due in part to his illness, but most importantly because of the vast cultural differences between Hungary and the United States.

WE COULD WELL
IMAGINE BARTÓK FROM
HIS TREETOP ROOM,
BEING SERENADED BY
AN AVIAN CHORUS AS
THE SPRING DAWNED IN
MARCH OF 1944.



Bartók was not Jewish. He came to America because he could not abide the Nazi juggernaut or the Hungarian government's seeming acquiescence to the horrors they perpetrated. Exile from his beloved country was self-imposed, not prompted by threats to his security. But Bartók still had an abiding love for his people and understood them well from his extensive travels with Zoltán Kodály, recording and notating folk music throughout Hungary. He knew he would have a hard time adjusting to life in America, but it was a far better alternative than trying to work under the Nazis. Bartók took refuge in America but was never at home here.

After his death, his American friends had a lingering sense that something wasn't quite right about the greatest Hungarian composer of the twentieth century being interred on foreign soil in what could be viewed as a pauper's grave. Finally, in 1950, five years after his burial, admirers of Bartók, led by publisher Milton Feist, arranged for a bronze marker to be placed on Bartók's grave. Aaron Copland was asked to speak at the dedication on behalf of the League of Composers, but he was unable to attend. He asked North Carolina composer Robert Ward to speak in his place at the ceremony. Ward, only 32-years-old at the time and on the faculty at The Juilliard School of Music, was a former student of Copland. It was quite an honor for the young composer to be asked to speak at an historic event honoring one of the giants of twentieth century music.

Earlier in his career, as a student at the Eastman School of Music, Ward became an admirer of Bartók's music. He had a tremendous appreciation for the set of the piano pieces "For Children" which preceded the "Mikrokosmos," as well as the Second Violin Sonata, the First, Second, Fifth, and Sixth String Quartets, and, of course, the Concerto for Orchestra. Ward had met the Hungarian composer only once – a very brief encounter at a reception for Bartók at the New York Public Library. He remarked that Bartók appeared frail and seemed very uncomfortable greeting the public. He was thin and diminutive, yet his eyes stood out like two dark orbs probing the space around him.

When Ward rose and spoke that day, he talked about the music, as well as the man. He alluded to specific musical examples in the Bartók catalogue, and paid tribute to the amazing originality and variety of his compositions. Ward did not know of the poignant statement Bartók made to his physician during his last days: "What I most regret is having to leave with a full trunk." Bartók meant that he was still overflowing with creative ideas. Ward ended his tribute with a quote from Yeats's poem "The Tower," which perfectly illustrated the sad, inevitable dilemma Bartók faced at the end of his life:

"When the swan must fix his eye
Upon a fading gleam,
Float out upon a long
Last reach of glittering stream
And there sing his last song."

Bartók left this world with many songs left unsung.

The last five years of Bartók's life were spent in America. During that time he found very few places where he could work in tranquility. The composer worked best in absolute, concentrated silence, with no distractions. His most extended stay away from New York was the five months he spent in Asheville, NC, from December 1943 through April of 1944. At this time his health, tenuous at best, seemed to be improving, and his doctors were anxious to avoid any possibility of a relapse. Fortunately ASCAP took an interest in Bartók's situation and arranged the trip to Asheville in hopes that his health would continue to improve. In Europe he had always sought to restore his sense of well-being in the mountains. Asheville, famous as a mountain resort, would provide a quiet work environment and put him in closer contact with nature.

Bartók lived in North Carolina sixty-five years ago, and it was widely assumed that he spent the winter of 1943-44 at the Grove Park Inn. Perhaps this impression has been reinforced by the fact that Bartók's picture is on display along with other famous guests who stayed at the Grove Park Inn, such as Thomas Edison, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Enrico Caruso, Harry Houdini, William Jennings Bryan, General John J. Pershing and Will Rogers.

In reality, Bartók did not reside at the Grove Park Inn. According to Peter Bartók, Béla's son, his father lodged instead at the Albemarle Inn. Happily, it turned out to be the perfect location for Bartók, away from the constant noise and teeming bustle of New York. At the Albemarle Inn, a boarding house at the time, Bartók accomplished much, putting the finishing touches on the Concerto for Orchestra, completing the Solo Sonata for Violin, which was dedicated to Yehudi Menuhin, cataloguing folk songs and notating bird calls which were to appear later in the Piano Concerto No. 3, sometimes referred to as the "Asheville Concerto."

Encountering the shy, mysterious composer, other boarders recalled to the *Greensboro Daily News* that, "he was a very quiet man who stayed alone most of the time. While other guests at the inn would sit around and talk after dinner, Bartók would leave the table immediately and go for a stroll through the grounds and surrounding woods, often with a notebook in hand to record bird songs."

Peter Bartók, on leave from the U.S. Navy, visited his father in Asheville in the spring of 1944. In his book, *My Father*, he relates the importance of the birds of North Carolina to the composer. "The second movement of the Third Piano Concerto, written a year later, begins quietly, slowly; it could be night. But in the middle of the movement, things begin to stir and, suddenly, there are the Asheville birds! You can hear them (beginning in measure 58) and sense the country morning as the mists clear up and the world awakens to new life."

On a recent North Carolina Symphony tour of western North Carolina I decided to pay a visit to the Albemarle Inn. Several of my orchestra colleagues, including Jess Levin, violinist and photographer; Petra Berenyi, cimbalom player, violist and native of Budapest; and cellist John McClellan accompanied me to the Inn. We received a gracious welcome from the owner, Cathy Sklar. She and her husband, Lawrence, have renovated the building beautifully and currently run it as a bed and breakfast.

We were amazed to find that the memory of Bartók is a major theme at the Inn. Mrs. Sklar pointed out the parlor, just off the

main entrance, where Bartók often played the piano. How many of the other lodgers realized the eminence of the pianist in the next room? On display just outside the parlor door is a book about the piano music of Bartók. Tasteful period furniture and antiques adorn the Inn throughout. And the sweeping staircase ascending to the second floor landing is truly impressive, with its carved oak banisters.

Our greatest thrill was actually getting to see the room where Bartók stayed during his sojourn in Asheville. With great anticipation we climbed the steeply graded stairs to the third floor. Bartók's room is at the top of the stairs, and on the door is a brass plaque that reads, "Bartók's Retreat." We gasped and smiled as if we had found the Ark. Here it was, Bartók's room. In decades of travel to Asheville, we never realized how close we were to this important historic site. The room is quite cozy, and feels very private. Though not original, the furnishings are modest and tasteful, much in keeping with the persona of the shy, quiet composer. We could well imagine Bartók from his treetop room, being serenaded by an avian chorus as the spring dawned in March of 1944.

On display at the Inn is a plaque presented in 1995 by the Embassy of the Republic of Hungary and the City Council of Asheville in remembrance of Bartók and the house he worked in during the winter of 1943-44. Inscribed on the plaque is Bartók's credo: "My own idea, however – of which I have been fully conscious since I found myself as a composer – is the brotherhood of peoples, brotherhood in spite of all wars and conflicts. I try – to the best of my ability – to serve this idea in my music; therefore I don't reject any influence, be it Slovakian, Romanian, Arabic or from any other source. The source must only be clean, fresh, and healthy!"

Postlude: In 1988, as the Iron Curtain disintegrated, the Republic of Hungary arranged to have Bartók's remains returned to his homeland. Forty-eight years after his death in America, Bartók made his final journey home to Budapest as a hero of the Hungarian people. Ironically, the man who had requested a simple good-bye to the world was finally laid to rest with an elaborate state

funeral. It was as if a collective conscience had, at last, erased the embarrassment of relegating a great man to a grave marked only with a number.

Though he is now at rest in his homeland far away, the Bartók legacy lives on. What he accomplished during his time in North Carolina is a significant part of that legacy. We can be proud that Bartók's visit to our state inspired him to write some of the greatest night music ever composed – the centerpiece of his Third Piano Concerto – the magnificent Concert of the Birds.



More photos at www.ncsymphony.org/photos



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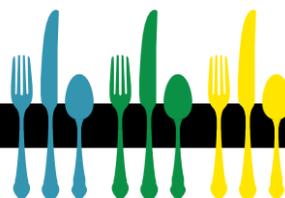
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POP QUIZ

pop quiz

Name all the brass instruments. Sure, you got trumpet, trombone, French horn and tuba, but did you think of saxophone? You would have if you knew we were talking metals. Brass is a golden-toned alloy of copper and zinc. Since the reddish copper and bluish-gray zinc can be combined in different quantities, a range of hues are actually on display in many brass (and a few woodwind) sections – from red brass (90% copper/10% zinc) to rose brass (85/15) to the yellow of cartridge brass (70/30). Saxophones can be made with any of these alloys, while more than a few instruments – or parts of instruments – in the brass section are not brass at all. Monel, a nickel, copper, iron and manganese blend, is often used in the valves of the most expensive brass horns. Various amounts of nickel, aluminum or steel can also be used in instrument construction, while sterling silver is a common sight along an orchestra's back rows, as it is highly prized for creating a particularly sharp and clear sound. For the pure at heart, how about a base material that's not an alloy? A copron bell is made of 100% copper.

The musical effect of all of this metallurgy is a hotly debated topic. Generally, the hardest metals reflect sound the best. Zinc makes brass harder, so the yellowest brasses should promote the clearest sounds. Adding copper to the horn adds warmth, color and texture to a performance, but, ultimately, the material is only as good as the mouth behind it. Just ask your neighbor's fifth-grade trombonist peeling the paint off of your living room walls.

- Arthur Ryel-Lindsey

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