



# MUSICIAN, with Luggage

By Jeannie Mellinger



*A side-by-side rehearsal in Asheville's Thomas Wolfe Auditorium.*

## On the Road, Asheville

It's a dark, cold and rainy morning in early spring. Two buses filled with North Carolina Symphony musicians drive through the gray streets, long wiper arms moving fast, headlights blinking through the downpour. The destination is Lipinsky Auditorium on the UNC-Asheville campus, where some early arrivals are peeling off their wet jackets and talking quietly.

Musicians filter in, and soon everyone is tuning up or changing reeds or checking bows or practicing runs and passages. The audience is small, but enthusiastic. Nearby middle and high schools cancelled their attendance at the last minute, citing bus-ing problems. But there are some students from a music history class at the university, as well as a group of band and orchestra students from Asheville High School. They seem excited to be here.

The program is colorful and lively – Respighi's *Tarantella*, Falla's *Spanish Dance*, Rossini's *William Tell Overture*, Brahms's *Hungarian Dance No. 7* and more. Associate Conductor Sarah Hicks engages the students from the podium as the musicians play through the program. She talks about the life of a musician – the

Eric Dyke. "It doesn't matter if we've played the piece fifty times before in the last months. The audience is maybe hearing it for the first time, and we always keep that in mind."

Dear Mr. Llewellyn: How many years have you been conducting? Who writes your music? Do you conduct the same people every time? I could go on forever, but I don't want you to have to read a thousand pages.

– Erin, grade 5

And so it has been since the earliest days. For nearly eighty years, the North Carolina Symphony has traveled across the state, from the mountains to the coast, presenting concerts in a tradition that is unmatched and unrivaled by any other orchestra in the country. "Approximately forty-five concerts are given free to school children in Raleigh and throughout the state each year," says Director of Education Jessica Nalbene. "Of those forty-five, about thir-

## Asheville, Late Afternoon

The North Carolina Symphony is at Thomas Wolfe Auditorium in downtown Asheville for a side-by-side rehearsal with the Asheville-Buncombe Youth Symphony. The musicians are scattered among the high school players – Symphony violins with student violins, Symphony clarinets with student clarinets and so on.

Rehearsal begins with Berlioz's *Hungarian March from La Damnation de Faust*, Op. 24. Sarah Hicks points out mistakes but does not stint on praise. "Don't put accents where they are not." And then, after a few false starts, "Good. That sounded much better." She is patient, but also quite clear about what she wants to hear. "Stop, please. Do the grace notes come before or on the beat?" Silence. And then, "Talk to me. Musically." With every instruction, the ensemble incrementally improves.

"The students had a really positive experience of rehearsing with a professional orchestra and conductor," says Youth Symphony Director Ron Clearfield. "It was nice too, that each of the students had a fine professional to sit with as a mentor. The students I talked with went away with enthusiasm and gratitude."



From left: Musicians confer before the concert, Cherokee students anticipate their North Carolina Symphony performance and students return to the bus after the Shelby concert.

daily hours of practice, teaching, rehearsal, chamber music, performance. The musicians demonstrate their instruments, section by section. The audience smiles for the oboe's snake charmer passage and rocks out with the percussion. The orchestra is performing this concert for the thirty-first time this school year, and before they return to Raleigh at the end of this trip they will have played it thirty-five times, with seven more to go before the end of the season.

How do they keep their playing energetic, their performance sharp? "To perform is an honor and a pleasure," says double bassist

ty of them are in rural areas, often serving schools with some of the highest poverty rates in North Carolina."

Retired principal clarinetist Jimmy Gilmore figures that in his forty-one years with the orchestra he played over 3,000 education concerts and traveled approximately 600,000 miles. "Great music sets a very high standard," he explains. "All of us must rise to the level of the subject. Beethoven is great whether we're playing in Meymandi Concert Hall or in a tobacco barn. We always try to play our best because each of us knows we owe it to Beethoven, the audience and ourselves."

## On the Road, Cherokee

Another day on the bus. It's no longer raining, but it is still overcast and chilly. The orchestra is heading west to Cherokee. Along the way, we pass Lost Cove Campground, Pan Fer Gold, Wigwam Gift Shop, Live Bears and the enormous Harrah's Cherokee Casino Hotel, one source of wealth that makes possible the gorgeous Cherokee Central Schools and Cultural Arts Center campus.

The school complex opened in 2010 and serves about 1,200 K-12 students. The 1,040-seat performance hall, with its state-



Assistant Concertmaster Rebekah Binford offers advice to a young Asheville violinist.



A student tries the violin at an Instrument Zoo.

of-the-art lighting and electronics, video projection, orchestra shell and forty-two-foot fly space is clearly one of the state's most impressively outfitted school concert venues.

The performance goes well, but the most exciting part of the orchestra's visit seems to be the post-concert Instrument Zoo. Dozens of children, twitching with excitement, wait in a long line to try out the flute, violin, clarinet, viola, trumpet, trombone and French horn. They nearly faint with pleasure when they produce an authentically musical sound. Best moment? A young boy, maybe nine or ten, notices violinists Maria Evola and Jeremy Preston waiting nearby. He runs over to get autographs. They comply. As he turns away to get back in line, his smile nearly wraps around his head. He shows his friends. They gasp. It's as if they were just handed the keys to a Camaro and told to go get pizza.

"I'm constantly amazed by how easy it is to get kids hooked on classical music," says Nalbone. "Some students will show up thinking that a concert of all classical rep-

ertoire is boring and dated, and time after time, we change their minds. It's all about the live concert! Even those who have heard the music beforehand and thought it didn't quite speak to them will then see the orchestra perform live, and that is what clinches the deal."

### On the Road, Shelby

Finally, a beautiful spring day, sunny and cool. Unlike the posh facilities at Cherokee, Shelby High School Auditorium is more of a "gymnasium." Students sit in bleachers on either side of the room and in chairs placed in front of the orchestra on the gym floor.

These students, fourth and fifth graders, many of them part of a big orchestra program in this school district, are attentive and polite. They respond to Sarah when she speaks to them and focus intently on the music. Their reactions to the instrument demonstrations are typical – there is an especially big response for the tuba and bassoons. Associate Principal Bassist Bob

There I was, walking to the Symphony. I felt so happy. When the musicians played a song my friend Philip and me hit our knees and copied the beat. When the conductor introduced the tuba, it shined and everybody said ooooooh! When the symphony was over, I didn't want to leave. I wanted to listen to more music. I hope I go there again.

– Derek, grade 4

Anderson, whose instrument is sporting a green scarf in honor of St. Patrick's Day, gets a laugh when he demonstrates those deepest angry bear notes.

One student seems unmoved by the performance, until the *William Tell* Overture.



Shelby students ready for the music.

• It would be so cool if I can be in a symphony too. I just have to get lessons and lots of practice.

– Andrew, grade 4

First, her eyebrows slowly rise. Then she turns to the student next to her and mouths the word, “Wow.” Soon she is galloping in her seat. She starts watching Bob, who is right in front of her, and when he has the opportunity, he makes a silly face at her. She grins back and nods. After the concert, she hangs back to talk to a couple of the musicians, face animated. We’ve seen this before. She’s hooked.

“Our orchestra changes the lives and outlooks of thousands of kids throughout North Carolina,” says Nalbone. She knows this, knows it’s quantifiable. She hears it from kids and teachers directly, reads it in the thousands of letters they send to the Symphony each season. Every day, musicians and staff meet long-grown adults who say that seeing the North Carolina Symphony perform at their tiny school in the fourth or fifth grade left an indelible mark on their lives and introduced them to an art form that they have cherished ever since. ●

SINCE ITS BEGINNINGS ALMOST EIGHTY YEARS AGO, the North Carolina Symphony has persisted in its service and commitment to the state, believing that sharing the experience of hearing live classical music for the first time with classmates and teachers is a powerful event for which there is no substitute. That’s why North Carolina musicians insist on playing their best, every time, no matter what, no matter how many times. That’s why they pack their suitcases and their instruments.

*That’s why they get on the bus.*



# How's YOUR TRILL?

*A Conversation with Ignat Solzhenitsyn*

Every high schooler cracking open *Romeo and Juliet* or museum visitor getting a first look at the water lilies knows that a few artists, though long passed, remain eternal. Putting it very simply, the reason for their longevity may be the new wrinkles, colors, subtleties – in short, the mysteries – uncovered and rediscovered each time we return to their work.

Such is the case with Beethoven, unquestionably one of history's leading artistic lights and a man at whom we take a direct look during concerts in Chapel Hill (October 27) and Raleigh (October 28 & 29). Our guest for these performances, renowned pianist and conductor Ignat Solzhenitsyn, is no stranger to the composer. He has been frequently celebrated for his interpretation of Beethoven's work, including resounding praise for breathing new life into those old music scores.

"Great Beethoven performances don't come along all that often," wrote *Philadelphia Inquirer* critic David Patrick Stearns following a 2008 concert by the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, which Solzhenitsyn led as principal conductor for six years. "Modern performers seem intimidated into respectful detachment rather than on-the-spot inspiration. You get used to it; it's still Beethoven, after all...Under Ignat Solzhenitsyn, the group has been a revitalizing force with Beethoven, but now more than ever."

You can understand our excitement, then, to welcome Solzhenitsyn back to the North Carolina Symphony, this time to perform Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4. It will be Solzhenitsyn's third appearance with the Symphony, following a successful Mozart/Brahms celebration in 2003 and acclaimed performances at our Schubert festival in 2006. Even for a man with his experience – and his reputation with the works of Beethoven – this performance will present some unique challenges. That's to be expected with one of those eternal artists.

**OPUS: TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF: WHERE DID YOU GROW UP? OTHER THAN PIANO, WHAT WERE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT INTERESTED YOU AS A CHILD?**

**IS:** I was born in Moscow and grew up in Switzerland, then Vermont. Being born into a Russian family, I loved reading and chess from an early age.

**HOW AND WHEN DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN THE PIANO? WHERE DID YOU STUDY?**

There was a baby grand that came with our house in Vermont, and it drew me immediately. I studied at first with teachers in the Vermont area, and then went to London at age 14, after being accepted by the great Maria Curcio. Eventually, I returned to the U.S. and completed a double major in piano and conducting at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT CLASSICAL MUSIC THAT SPEAKS TO YOU? WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE IT OVER OTHER FORMS OF EXPRESSION?**

More than other forms of art, music seems to speak directly to my core, to the inner me. It is something beyond reason, beyond emotion, something even more fundamental.

**WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT HAVING A CAREER AS A CLASSICAL PIANIST? WHAT IS THE DOWNSIDE?**

The best thing about having a career in music is the music itself, thinking about it, performing it, hearing it. The downside is that, as with all art, the finish line keeps receding into the distance.

**WHAT MUSIC DO YOU LIKE TO LISTEN TO IN YOUR FREE TIME?**

Haydn quartets, Bruckner symphonies, anything by Brahms.

**WHO IS THE MOST UNDERRATED CLASSICAL COMPOSER, IN YOUR OPINION?**

It could be Mendelssohn. It could be Shostakovich. But the best answer is Brahms, whose awe-inspiring synthesis of reason and emotion is so sophisticated that even most musicians fail adequately to perceive the full measure of his genius.

**SOME CRITICS ARE CONCERNED THAT CLASSICAL MUSIC IS A DYING ART FORM. HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THAT?**

Nothing immortal can die. The forms and trappings of musical performance might change from one era to another, but the underlying nourishment remains essential to our self-awareness as humans. Should we ever cease to thirst for Beethoven (or Shakespeare or Dostoyevsky, for that matter), then truly, in the haunting words of Lord Balfour, "Man will go down into the pit and all his thought will perish."

**WHAT IS YOUR PRACTICE ROUTINE? AND DO YOU HAVE ANY PERFORMANCE RITUALS OR SUPERSTITIONS?**

On a concert day, I like to go through the entire program in the morning. Then lunch and sleep. No dinner until afterwards.

**HISTORICAL FIGURE YOU WISH YOU COULD MEET?**

Jesus of Nazareth.

**WHAT IS YOUR FANTASY CAREER?**

Polar explorer. Even today names like Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen and Peary are synonymous with bravery, heroism, self-sacrifice.

**YOUR PERSONAL HERO?**

Beethoven.

**YOUR BIGGEST SELF-INDULGENCE/ GUILTY PLEASURE?**

Surfing the internet.

**RUDOLF SERKIN ONCE SAID SOMETHING TO THE EFFECT THAT A PERFORMER COULD HAVE ALL THE MUSICAL FEELING IN THE WORLD, BUT IF HE DIDN'T HAVE A GOOD TRILL HE COULDN'T PLAY BEETHOVEN'S PIANO CONCERTO NO. 4 WELL. IN OTHER WORDS, A SOLID FOUNDATION OF TECHNIQUE IS ESSENTIAL TO PROJECTING THE EMOTION OF THE PIECE. FIRST, HOW IS YOUR TRILL? BUT MORE SERIOUSLY, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT TECHNIQUE VS. EMOTION IN THE SUCCESS OF A PERFORMANCE?**

This is a terrific example, because trills in Beethoven are very much expressive devices that outline some of his most poignant music. We can no more separate technique from music-making than we can indicate a preference for running with the left leg or the right.

**THE CONCERTO'S SECOND MOVEMENT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS A CONTEST BETWEEN THE PIANO AS PACIFIST AND THE ORCHESTRA AS AGGRESSOR. GRADUALLY THE PACIFIST WINS OVER THE AGGRESSOR, AND THEY STOP OPPOSING EACH OTHER AND START PLAYING TOGETHER. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE METAPHORICAL MESSAGING BEHIND THAT IDEA? ARE THERE OTHER WORKS YOU LIKE TO PLAY THAT HAVE A PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNING?**

Going back to Liszt and even Czerny, the atmosphere of this movement is associated with the pleading of Orpheus at the gates of Hades. The ideas of all-conquering love, indomitable human will, conditional victory and certainly a multitude of others are embedded in this dramatic and deeply moving myth. Of course, the irresistible power of this ancient narrative makes the Fourth Concerto especially compelling, but, in truth, all great music, probably without exception, has philosophical underpinnings that are central to its message. They that have ears let them hear.

**WHAT PIECE OF MUSIC HAS PRESENTED THE GREATEST CHALLENGE TO YOU? HOW DID YOU MEET THAT CHALLENGE?**

The greatest challenge frequently seems to lie straight ahead, while past successes (less so, past failures) are quickly forgotten. What keeps me awake at night is how best to bring across the next piece of music I am working on.

**YOU'RE BOTH A CONDUCTOR AND A SOLOIST. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FOR YOU TO BE ONE IN A GIVEN WEEK AND THEN THE OTHER THE FOLLOWING WEEK?**

Since I do both so much, the transition is quite natural. The main difference is in the much more intimate interaction with the musicians of the orchestra that occurs when conducting.

**YOU'VE BEEN TO RALEIGH SEVERAL TIMES NOW. WHAT DO YOU MOST LOOK FORWARD TO, OTHER THAN, OF COURSE, THE CONCERT ITSELF?**

I've made some close friends in Raleigh over the years, and I look forward to catching up with them while in town. ●



# the trombone

*The instrument maker says to the coppersmith, how do you make a brass tube longer? Dub, says the coppersmith, add more tube.* Simple as the answer sounds, it took until the 1800s to perfect the valve, which diverts airflow in brass instruments into a new section of pipe, making the instrument longer, expanding its range. Any new trend has its nonconformists, and the modern orchestra features one such outlier that has remained virtually unchanged since its earliest incarnations.

The first slide trombones appeared in the Flemish court in the mid-to-late-15th century, a variation on the medieval trumpet accordingly called the trompette-saqueboute. The name became, in English, sackbut, fodder for a good, childish guffaw until you remember the related word saqueboute, a 14th-century Norman weapon for pulling riders off of horses. By the 16th century, these trombones were regular features in church music, while small-town brass bands became a common attraction. A surviving manuscript from the era is Matthew Locke's "Music for his Majesty's Sagbutts and Cornets." Now that's fodder for a guffaw.

The instrument entered the orchestra as a sacred music specialist in the 18th century, around the time the word "trombone," from the Italian for trumpet, *tromba*, mercifully made its first published appearance. Gluck was an early convert, while Mozart used trombone only in his sacred works and operas. Even then he applied his characteristic genius, resulting in two required passages for trombone virtuosos: the supper scene of *Don Giovanni* and in the Requiem's Tuba mirum. Drafted into military bands in the 19th century, the trombone is now a well-established presence, though, sadly, no longer a verb; in his 1884 travelogue *Tropical Africa*, evangelist Henry Drummond wrote, "The hippopotami...tromboning at us within pistol-shot kept us awake at night." Could have been worse, Mr. Drummond. He could have been sackbutting.

- Arthur Ryel-Lindsey

