

Colburn In Focus

Conservatory Trumpet Players Learn, Grow Tackling Pintscher's Concerto Together

by Lillian Matchett



When Josh Rogan and Michael Harper got news over the summer that they would be performing Matthias Pintscher's *Chute d'étoiles* with Pintscher himself conducting the Colburn Orchestra, they were honored and excited by the opportunity. They also understood it was a huge responsibility. The piece is exceedingly difficult and intricate, requiring close collaboration between both trumpet soloists.

Performing *Chute d'étoiles* holds distinct significance for Michael, as it was originally premiered by his former teacher Michael Sachs, alongside fellow trumpet player Jack Sutte and the Cleveland Orchestra in 2012. "It's very special to me personally," Michael remarked. "I spent two years in Cleveland and learned a lot from my teacher, so it's really cool to be playing the same piece that he premiered only five years ago."

Michael had the good fortune of catching up with the two Cleveland Orchestra trumpeters over dinner and drinks shortly after finding out he would be performing the demanding piece. "I asked [Michael Sachs and Jack Sutte] if they had any tips on how to practice it and they just said 'start it as soon as possible, learn it very slowly, and do a lot of finger drills.'"

The duo did just that, spending months meticulously preparing their own parts before coming together to work out fine details together in January. “It’s the kind of thing you can’t quite learn on the go,” said Josh. “The trickiest part is when there are passages when Michael has 35 notes at a very quick speed and I have to come in and join him.”

Working with a partner provided Josh with feedback into his own playing, and insight into how to improve the process. “For the first rehearsal we sat down to play the fast running stuff, and I noticed that Michael had a lot more clarity to the changes. So I thought ‘OK, I’m going to work on that,’ and the next time we got together it was much better.

The two started working with Pintscher upon his arrival in Los Angeles earlier this week, but Michael was lucky to get some early advice from the composer and conductor when working with him at the Lucerne Festival last summer. His advice? Don’t get caught up on the little stuff.

“There are some rhythms in this piece that are kind of scary to look at, and Pintscher told me ‘don’t worry about the exact notations of the rhythms, but play the gesture. It’s more about getting the right notes and having the gesture than getting the precise metronomic rhythm.’”

They’ve found another key to duo success is simple congeniality. “It helps that Josh is a very pleasant guy to work with. I mean, playing a solo piece is great, but the fact that there’s someone else playing this piece with me is reassuring and more fun.”

Josh returned the sense of camaraderie and quipped, “there’s been no point at which I’ve thought ‘if only Michael wasn’t playing.’”

When asked what they are most excited about, both players emphasized that the significance of playing Pintscher’s work with Pintscher. “It’s always great to work with a composer and get their verbal feedback and energy, but so rarely do you also have the chance to get their physical gestures,” said Josh.

“We are very fortunate. This is not a normal experience. I know it’s something I’ll be proud of forever.”

Josh and Michael perform Matthias Pintscher’s Chute d’étoiles and Mahler’s Symphony No. 7 with Pintscher conducting at Ambassador Auditorium on Saturday, February 4

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