



SUMMER 2002

## Balanced brilliance: the clarinet section

**H**armonious. Stable. Complementary. When Seattle Symphony musicians use these terms to describe the three individuals who comprise the clarinet section, they are referring to their personalities as well as their playing style.

Principal **Chris Sereque**, **Larey McDaniel** and **Laura deLuca** have been together for nearly 15 years. They are friends and colleagues who are equally adept at playing the same notes together and playing different notes together.

JIM BALL



*The long and short of the clarinet section:  
Larey McDaniel, Laura deLuca and Chris Sereque*

This is an important ability, Larey notes, because of the range of the symphony's repertoire. "Classical music typically has three different parts for clarinet, so the three of us are usually called upon to play different notes, in the same time and rhythm. But contemporary music is more individualized—and therefore often more challenging, and more fun."

He says their fun also comes from playing different instruments. Clarinets actually come in many sizes, and this section can handle them all. Larey's primary assignment is the bass clarinet. For the Silk Road series in May, he rented a contrabass clarinet—an instrument used too rarely to justify purchasing one.

Laura is typically the one to pick up the piccolo clarinet when the music calls for it, although Larey sometimes shares that assignment.

Part of their "harmony," according to Laura, derives from the fact that the three individuals complement one another by bringing different strengths to the section. "Chris' preparedness and consistency are amazing. There's never anything last-minute with him; he always knows the music. I bring a variety of experience through playing a lot of chamber music, including contemporary music and klezmer (Jewish folk) music. I admire the spontaneity of folk musicians. Larey comes with a lot of musical knowledge in his fingers. He's played the repertoires many times. When he was a second clarinetist, he played the parts I now play. So he's very helpful to me."

### Varied routes to Seattle

The three came to Seattle by very different routes, although Chris' and Laura's paths crossed repeatedly along the way. Chris Sereque earned a degree from Indiana University and then studied with Robert Marcellus, the Cleveland Orchestra's famous clarinetist. Laura was also a pupil of his. "I still remember hearing Chris play a Brahms sonata in a Marcellus master class," she says. "His musicianship was wonderful."

Later, when Chris left the principal clarinet position with the Fort Wayne orchestra to move to Seattle and join the symphony, Laura—then still a student at Northwestern

*Continues on page 7*

LAREY MCDANIEL



# Music—and our patrons—help us through the difficult times

*By Scott Wilson, horn  
Chairperson, Seattle Symphony & Opera Players' Organization*

*Scott Wilson is a 30-year veteran of the Seattle Symphony and Seattle Opera.*

*He attended Seattle public schools, the University of Puget Sound and the Vienna Conservatory. Scott has been serving as the symphony's associate librarian since November.*

**A**s I began this essay, I started to list all the orchestra business that might be of interest to our patrons. Happily, there is very little to report on the political front. We are just finishing the first year of our unprecedented five-year labor contract and, except for a few minor tweakings here and there, it governs our daily work well and represents a great stride forward for the organization.

We have hired three new violinists and a cellist, and are holding auditions for several important principal positions this June.

## The best and worst of the season

There have been many great concerts this season, most recently the incredible Silk Road series with YoYo Ma. We have hosted other distinguished soloists and carried out a

successful concert tour of Florida. However, as I think of all the successes of the 2001-2002 season, I can't help but remember that our first rehearsal was to have been on September 11.

I was awakened that morning by my oldest daughter, calling from Minneapolis. She told me to go downstairs and turn on the television. Along with millions of other Americans, I watched in horror at the unfolding tragedy. Our younger daughter had begun college classes in New York City the week before, and we could not reach her. My wife and I were frantic and, to be honest, going to Benaroya Hall to begin rehearsals for the new season was not what I wanted to do at that point.

But the season did begin, with a delay of only one day, and it was a relief to be surrounded by music. There was also inspiration in that first evening's concert—and in the weeks that followed—to see so many of you in the audience. It reminded us all that the power of music to heal and comfort and inspire is why we play—and, I believe, why you are there in the audience.

So, from the orchestra to you—all of you who support and love this institution: thank you for being there in the best and the worst of times. ●

*Some of the photos in this issue were taken at Benaroya Hall, home of the Seattle Symphony. Gerard Schwarz, Music Director.*

*Coming soon to a computer screen near you: the new and improved musicians' website. In August the SSOPO will be back on the internet at [www.seattlesymmusicians.org](http://www.seattlesymmusicians.org). The site will contain some of the musicians' stories and other information, and also an e-mail reply option to allow readers to suggest topics for future articles.*



MICHAEL SHMIDT

*The symphony's February tour in Florida provided both new concert experiences and a respite from Seattle weather. Violinist Ami Campbell and cellist Roberta Downey found time for a little sunny sightseeing between rehearsals and performances. For more about the tour, see page 6.*

# Playing for the opera in the Arena: More space, better acoustics

Opera-goers waited with trepidation last year for Seattle Opera's move to the remodeled Mercer Arts Arena—a transition necessitated by the total reconstruction of the Opera House. Many wondered how opera music would sound in a facility originally constructed for ice hockey and rock concerts.

After three productions in the new space, opera audiences seem happy. The musicians who play for the opera are, as well.

The orchestra pit in the old Opera House was notorious: for its very cramped footprint, ultra-low ceiling, and multi-level floor that invited people to stumble in the all-black environment. It also had a woefully inadequate air circulation system, which left the space feeling low on oxygen—especially on warm summer evenings when the production was a five-plus-hour *Ring Cycle* opera.

The difference between the old and the new was most dramatic during the spring run of "Salome," which required a particularly large orchestra—"much like a Wagner production," according to violinist **Joan Martin Woodard**. There were many extra musicians in the pit, along with the fulltime musicians.

"We were told the Arena pit has the same square footage as the one in the old Opera House, but it doesn't feel as claustrophobic," Joan says. "There are no low ceilings or pillars, and it doesn't have a two-tiered floor."

## Out from under the stage

A major reason for the sensation of additional space is the fact that it is not tucked under the stage the way the Opera House pit was. "That's a wonderful change," says trumpet player **Rick Pressley**. "I can produce a decent sound in the Arena. And the position of the pit relative to the stage makes it possible for most of us in the orchestra to even see a little bit of the



*Joan Martin Woodard*

action onstage. It makes us more of a part of the production. When we were back under the stage at the Opera House, we were so separated from the singers that it was like being in another room."

The musicians who played for operas in the old facility, in fact, could



*Rick Pressley*

not see the action onstage at all. Many members of the orchestra provided instrumental music for dozens of operas over the years without ever getting a glimpse of any of the productions.

The acoustics for the musicians themselves are also improved in some respects. "The woodwinds suffered in the Opera House pit because they were mashed together with the brass," Rick says. "Everyone is a little more spread out now. So no one ends up deafened."

However, the pit in the Arena is very wide compared to the useable space in the old pit, which leaves the musicians on one "wing" unable to hear those on the far end adequately. "I can hear the woodwinds better

through the onstage monitors than I can detect their sound coming across the pit," according to Rick.

## A better blending of sound

Because of this separation, principal tuba **Chris Olka** says it's more difficult to play ensemble. "But the openness of the pit means that our sound goes up. Because the singers' voices go straight out into the house, the orchestra and the voices blend better. It's more like the Met."

Two logistical factors are more complicated in the Arena. The musicians' only space to warm up is a congested backstage hallway, and getting in and out of the pit can be difficult because the only exits are at the sides of the wide space. Still, according to cellist **Walter Gray**, "The Arena pit feels downright gracious compared to the old one. Now we're all waiting to see what our space will be like in the renovated Opera House." ●

PHOTOS BY LAREY MCDANIEL

# Arriving and retiring string players illustrate t

*There were changes in the string sections this season, with one long-time member absent and two new musicians added. These three provide examples of the way the education and job demands of Seattle Symphony musicians have changed over the past several decades.*

**S**ue Gregory retired at the end of the 2000-01 season. After 38 years with the symphony, her focus has shifted to a segment of the population not often seen in Benaroya Hall: the very young.

Since leaving the orchestra, Sue has welcomed two small people into her life: the toddler she frequently cares for, and a grandson born in late March. It's a treat, she says, to watch these children acquire new skills on a daily basis.

In some ways, it's a fulfillment of the life she long ago imagined she would have. Sue says she has always loved children, and earned a degree in elementary education from the University of Washington with the goal of becoming a third-grade teacher. "It never occurred to me then that I would earn my living with my violin," she remembers. "My mother and my siblings were all elementary school music teachers, and I assumed I would be, too."

Sue had also been a serious violin student since grade school, and her college curriculum included an emphasis on music. At UW, she received rigorous preparation in violin performance through study with the renowned violinist Emmanuel Zetlin, who had been concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera before moving to Seattle.

Before Sue finished her bachelor's degree, she was asked to audition for the symphony. She won the audition, and began rehearsals with the orchestra while doing her student teaching.

Her elementary education degree was put to use for a few years. Because playing with the symphony was not then a fulltime job, she also taught instrumental music in the public schools part-time.

Among the many changes that Sue cites during her tenure with the symphony is "enormous growth in the amount of music the musicians must learn quickly."

"I was trained differently," she says. "As a student, I would spend up to three months learning a violin concerto, with Mr. Zetlin as my piano accompanist. I learned those pieces so well that years later I could easily accompany visiting soloists playing the same concerti. The demands on the orchestra today don't allow that level of preparation."

## Different paths lead to new musicians' careers

Jennifer Bai, too, was educated in a musical system different from most of her orchestra colleagues'. She grew up in a city north of Beijing, China, and began learning the violin as a three-year-old. She was a boarding student at the Beijing School of Music from the age of 10 until she came to the United States at 19 to continue her studies.

Jennifer's father, a professional violinist who went on to become a conductor, was her first

JIM BALL



*Retired violinist Sue Gregory*

JIM BALL



*New violinist Jennifer Bai*

# the evolution of the orchestra



LAREY MCDANIEL

*New bass player Jonathan Burnstein*

teacher. “From the time I was small,” she remembers, “I wanted to be a musician in a fine orchestra.”

Jennifer won a music scholarship to the University of Southern California, and studied there for six years under the tutelage of Alice Schoenfeld. “She’s been the most important person in my life since I came to the U.S.,” Jennifer says. “She’s like my grandma as well as my teacher.”

**Jonathan Burnstein**, by contrast, grew up in a non-musical family. As a Chicago-area teenager, he played the electric bass with jazz groups. His jazz teachers suggested that classical music lessons would improve his playing, and “it only took about six months for me to decide that classical music was my thing,” he says.

“I love jazz, too, and I continued to play a little of it in college. But I had to choose where to put my energy.”

He attended Juilliard for a year and then transferred to the Curtis Institute, where he earned a

bachelor’s degree. Hal Robinson at Curtis was his most influential teacher.

After finishing a master’s degree at Rice University, he played with the Colorado Symphony in Denver before winning the Seattle audition last summer.

Jennifer and Jonathan rave about the beauty of the Northwest, and list hiking and other outdoor activities as favorite pastimes. Both also acknowledge they’ve had a demanding first year with the orchestra, preparing many new pieces for a season in which the symphony and opera repertoire included the Silk Road series and the challenging score for “Salome.”

“It’s maybe a good thing Seattle has rainy winters,” according to Jonathan, “because I had to spend most of the winter indoors, practicing.” ●

## Season highlights— from the musicians’ perspectives

**W**e’re coming to the end of a stellar season—a year in which there was perhaps unprecedented diversity in programming for both the symphony and opera. Patrons undoubtedly have “stand-out” memories of performances that left them awed, and the musicians do, too. Here’s a small sampling of their perspectives on the best of the year:

Violinist **Joan Martin Woodard** and principal bassoon player **Seth Krimsky** were most impressed with piano soloist Lang Lang. “He was an electrifying performer,” according to Joan. “This was his first appearance with the symphony, and I hope we will have him back on a regular basis. He performed not long after September 11, and played his own arrangement of ‘The Stars and Stripes Forever’ as his

encore. It brought down the house.”

Cellist **Walter Gray** says the highlight for him was “The Silk Road Project,” with its series of five concerts featuring Yo Yo Ma and music from a half dozen Asian countries. “It was wonderful that the symphony presented it; it was a stunning show.”

Trumpet player **Rick Pressley** particularly liked the Masterpiece Series concerts with guest conductor Roberto Abbado. “He’s a great, demanding conductor, and it was fun playing Rachmaninov’s third symphony with him. Mr. Abbado had been here once before; working with him this time was even better, because we had some acquaintance with him and knew what to expect.”

**David Taylor**, who most often

plays bassoon and contrabassoon, enjoyed the saxophone and clarinet work for a “Discover Music” performance of *Eudora’s Fable: The Shoe Bird*. Written by

contemporary composer Sam Jones and based on a children’s story, the music includes multiple saxophone solos because the

instrument represents the voice of Gloria Goose. “I think it had only been done in Seattle once before, and it’s a lovely piece,” according to Dave. “We got wonderful letters from children afterward saying how much they had enjoyed it.” ●



LAREY MCDANIEL

*David Taylor*

# Touring Florida, musicians find warm weather and warm audiences

It was the first out-of-state tour for the Seattle Symphony in a number of years. Musicians, instruments and staff traveled to Florida to play five concerts in five February days. The trip produced rich experiences, family reunions, additional fans, and perhaps a new perspective on what it means to play in Seattle.

For tuba principal **Chris Olka**, the trip was “old home week.” Chris attended college in Florida and met his wife, **Kim Russ**, there. Kim has been the substitute pianist for the symphony for part of this season, while Victoria Bogdashevskaya has been on leave. Kim also participated in the tour, which enabled her and Chris’ families in Florida to hear both of them perform with a major symphony orchestra for the first time.

“It was a real kick to have my parents, four little brothers and grandmother in the audience,” according to

precision, thanks in large part to SSO staff members Karen Choo and Jennifer Adair, who made a pre-tour scouting trip to determine specifics such as hotels, driving times from one city to the next, and the best places to load and unload a truck full of instruments.

The musicians enjoyed the fact that the repertoire varied from one performance to the next. Concert organizers in each location had been given program options, and chose pieces based on what they expected their audiences to like—and what

had recently been performed by other visiting orchestras.

“We had sophisticated audiences,” according to trumpet player **Rick Pressley**. “The cities we visited have discriminating, highly organized committees that choose their visiting orchestras and the music they play.”

Cellist **Walter Gray** found Florida to be an unusual performance environment.

Although some areas visited by the SSO do not have their own full-time resident orchestras, cities like Sarasota receive regular visits from major touring orchestras. “The people who were in our audiences hear impressive symphonies all the time,” he said. “There are also many retired professional musicians living in Florida, and some came to the performances and sought us out afterward to reminisce about life onstage.”

From Walter’s perspective, the tour provided a valuable opportunity:



ROBERTA HANSEN DOWNEY

*Looking out into the audiences in a series of unfamiliar halls is part of the concert tour experience.*

“Any time the orchestra leaves home, we’re in places we’re not accustomed to playing, and it causes us to think about it differently. We become very aware of working to present a good image of the orchestra.”

“Touring is also important because orchestras need to branch out and broaden our spectrum. Some critics allege that professional classical musicians are a dying breed, and we can best counter that claim by appealing to more people and more places.”

Bass player **Jonathan Burnstein** enjoyed the very positive reviews the performances received in Florida newspapers. But, he said, the concerts also made him appreciative of Seattle symphony-goers. “Our tour performances were in halls smaller than Benaroya,” he remembers, “and we were told they often have trouble filling those halls for orchestral music. So I would look out from the stage, and realize that we had a larger and more enthusiastic audience waiting for us at home.” ●



LARRY McDANIEL



**Chris Olka**,  
principal tuba

**Walter Gray**, cello

Chris. “I think they all felt like Kim and I had ‘made good.’ At the reception after the Orlando performance, our families filled a huge table—and Gerry (Music Director Gerard Schwarz) made sure they had a table right up front.”

## Complicated logistics, varied programming

According to violinist **Joan Martin Woodard**, the logistically complex tour proceeded with amazing

# Balanced brilliance: the clarinet section

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University—auditioned for his old job. About five years later, when there was a temporary second clarinet opening in Seattle, Chris called Robert Marcellus and asked him to recommend someone. Laura was Marcellus' choice. She eventually won the SSO's second clarinet position on a permanent basis after the former occupant of the chair decided not to return from a leave of absence.

The result of these early interactions, besides some good material for reminiscences? A balanced sound, according to Chris. He points out that there are many sounds to a clarinet, and many styles of playing. How well these harmonize has great impact on the quality of a section. "The human factor is the biggest determinant of the sound of a clarinet section," he says. "The principal has to have the brightest sound; if the second clarinet has more brilliance, the balance will be off. We understand that dynamic, and the three of us are quite well matched.

"The ability to create the right sound together is so important that, in Europe, symphony woodwind players are often chosen as teenagers and put on a career track to ensure they will fit into the sound of a particular orchestra. We don't do that in the United States; our selection methods are much less structured, so there's much more chance for a mismatch among clarinet section players."

## Bremerton beginnings, followed by a movie gig

Larey says his primary influence as a student was UW music professor and longtime Seattle Symphony principal clarinetist Ronald Phillips. While still a student at Bremerton High School, Larey began riding the ferry to Seattle to study with him. Larey landed a Seattle Symphony audition before finishing his bachelor's degree, and has been with the orchestra since. He also played in the World's Fair Band in 1962, and can be fleetingly seen in the Elvis Presley movie "It Happened at the World's Fair."

In addition to anchoring the section with his bass clarinet, Larey devotes much time to the Northwoods Wind Quintet. The group's mission is educational, and he and his flutist wife, Phyllis, have played with the quintet in virtually every elementary school in Washington, demonstrating to children that classical music can be fun.

While Larey's resumé epitomizes the kind of career stability that most professional musicians can only dream of, both Chris and Laura did their share of nail-biting and penny-counting before they landed permanent jobs.

Chris free-lanced in New York City, and disliked that musical lifestyle profoundly. So he accepted a job as the principal clarinetist with the National Symphony Orchestra of Peru. He and his wife Ruth, a violinist, arrived in Lima speaking virtually no Spanish. "Those were five difficult years, in part because we experienced fulltime xenophobia," he remembers. "But I learned a great deal. There was immense talent in that orchestra—fine European musicians who had emigrated to South America to escape the Holocaust years before."

Laura also free-lanced: in Chicago, for five years after earning her degree. "I played a lot of chamber music, and supported myself by teaching and waitressing. I was even a short-order cook," she recalls.

After the stress of his early career years, Chris' experience in winning the principal job with the Seattle Symphony was a triumphant one: the sort of scenario that fuels young professional musicians' fantasies. There are only 50 fulltime principal clarinetists in U.S. orchestras, and the 1979 Seattle audition attracted some of the best-known classical clarinetists in the country. "I recognized many names on the roster when I signed in on the day of the audition," Chris remembers. "Most of the people there couldn't even pronounce my name. I think everyone was stunned that I won over all the more prominent musicians." ●

Larey McDaniel's talents extend far beyond his clarinets. Many of the photos in this issue are his work. Larey specializes in landscape, portrait and wedding photography; examples can be viewed at [www.mcdphoto.com](http://www.mcdphoto.com)



Favorites: the trio's take on the best clarinet music

**CHRIS SEREQUE:** *The letter-writing scene in "La Traviata." It's the quintessential clarinet solo, both mellow and singing.*

**LAREY MCDANIEL:** *"Der Rosenkavalier" is terrific for bass clarinet. But most of the part was actually written for a basset horn, so it's tough to play.*

**LAURA DELUCA:** *The clarinet quintets by Brahms and Mozart are real shiners. The Copland clarinet concerto is fun and has lots of flavor because it was written for Benny Goodman. Great lyrical passages.*

## Backstage...

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### Editorial board

This newsletter reflects the input of dozens of members of the orchestra. The project is guided by:

*Cecilia Poellin Buss, violin*      *Virginia Hunt Luce, violin*  
*Roberta Hansen Downey, cello*      *Joan Martin Woodard, violin*  
*Nancy Griffin, bass*

### Your suggestions welcomed

To suggest a story topic or make other comments, please write to us at our return address, or leave a message at 206 224-4487.

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# A strange wind blew through Benaroya. . .

Symphony-goers returned to their seats after intermission at the mid-May Baroque concerts to find a very strange contraption onstage: a large wood and canvas structure that looked as if it might contain an exercise wheel for a giant hamster.

The device is actually a wind machine, and it was hauled out of deep storage for use in Rameau's "Suite from *Les Boréades*."

Percussionist Mike Clark played the machine in May, although he reports that "play" is hardly the best description for the activity. The wheel is turned with a crank and a good deal of effort. "Any primate could do it," Mike says. "It doesn't exactly require a dozen years of music education."

It does, however, require a certain level of aerobic fitness on the part of the operator. It also requires sandbags. When the machine was

built for the symphony, it was apparently crafted of the lightest possible materials to enable it to be moved on and off stage more easily. The result, according to Mike, is that it has a tendency to become airborne during long passages unless the base is anchored with sandbags.

He was surprised to learn that the machine actually produces a reasonable approximation of wind to audiences' ears. Standing next to it, he hears something very different and not particularly wind-like.

The machine has been part of the symphony's assortment of non-traditional pieces of percussion equipment for as long as Mike can remember—and he began performing as an extra with the orchestra while still a Seattle high school student. Many orchestra patrons have never seen it, however, because few pieces of music call for



LAREY MCDANIEL

*Percussionist and wind machinist  
Mike Clark*

wind. The most commonly performed work with wind undertones? Ferde Grofé's "Grand Canyon Suite." ●