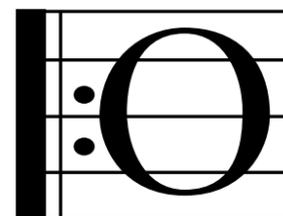


IT TAKES AN ORCHESTRA

The North Carolina Symphony celebrates its 80th season with a colorful cast of characters, a complex composition, and an ear for yesterday.

WRITTEN BY MICHAEL GRAFF | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRAVIS DOVE

Grant Llewellyn grew up in Wales, worked under Leonard Bernstein in New York, and now crosses an ocean each year to lead the N.C. Symphony.



ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, a song is born. It is music, sprung from marks on a page. But it was an idea first. An idea to create a scene of dawn through music.

Maurice Ravel would have seen many sunrises growing up in France in the 1880s, far from North Carolina where textile mills and furniture plants were taking hold. Ravel's dad was an inventor — one of his most famous contributions was a circus act in which a car could do somersaults — and he was an open-minded man, providing his son a life with freedom to explore. The kind of life where Ravel probably had time to sit around and appreciate the sunrise. And chances are, when Ravel saw those sunrises he was near a stream, and there were birds. And chances are, the stream and the birds sounded like two pitches of the flute. And chances are, on those mornings in France the young boy heard more birds join the chorus, and the Earth must have gotten louder as it awakened. Even the sun's beams must have made a sound to him.

Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* starts like that. It debuts in a concert hall in Paris in 1912, and within the first notes the audience hears his version of sunrise. The song opens with two flutes, making that brook ripple. Soon more flutes join, making those birds sing. Then a high-pitched E-flat clarinet chimes in, introducing one particularly excited bird tweeting for daylight. And then the violins and violas and cellos, with the musicians' bows taking long and slow trips across the strings, pulling that sun right into the sky.

After sunrise, Ravel takes his audience through the day, adding a big evening party at the end with drinking and laughing and fun. It becomes an hour-long composition, sounds jumping from a million marks on pages. It is one of the most involved pieces of music any

orchestra has ever played. The final score has markings for, now follow this: three flutes, two piccolos, three oboes, two clarinets, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two harps, three bassoons, an English horn, a bass clarinet, an E-flat clarinet, a contrabassoon, a tuba, a timpani, a triangle, a tambourine, a wind machine, a celesta, and a whole string section.

Ravel began working on *Daphnis et Chloé* in 1909, in the same decade that saw Henry Ford invent the assembly line for cars and the Wright Brothers' first flight. It is three years later when he finishes it. The score is an engine of its own, an engine of art made up of thousands of smaller pieces of art. In music, though, once the composer makes his final edits, once he's done, the song has only just been born. It takes on life after that, in the ears of audiences who'll hear it for the first time, forever.

In the years that follow Ravel's release, the score is reprinted. Forward-thinking orchestras — the North Carolina Symphony is one — will buy a copy. The copies sit on shelves in libraries around the world. Music is the most valuable piece of any orchestra.

Then in November 2011, N.C. Symphony music director Grant Llewellyn decides *Daphnis et Chloé* will be a part of his orchestra's show the following September. That show will be the first big indoor concert of the N.C. Symphony's 80th anniversary season. It will also mark the 100th anniversary of the song.

Llewellyn tells the symphony's librarian to pull the music from the shelf. In May 2012, Llewellyn and his tuba player, orchestra personnel manager Dave Lewis, scour through the score to determine how many instruments and people they will need to perform it. They decide on 96. The N.C. Symphony has only 65 full-time orchestra members, so Lewis recruits 31 more. The orchestra — built for this one piece — is set by the summer. Then in late August, two weeks before rehearsals, the librarian pulls the sheet music off the shelves and puts it into



Before some musicians become permanent fixtures in the orchestra that practices at Meymandi Concert Hall, they survive a days-long blind audition and more tryouts.

folders. Each musician has a personal folder. The flutists, for instance, have sheet music that makes the sound of the birds; the strings the sound of the sunrise. The concertmaster, or lead violinist, takes his sheet music and marks up-bows and down-bows, and the string section's musicians copy his marks to make sure their bows move in unison. Every piece of the engine must work on time.

Llewellyn is a chipper Welshman who makes funny faces and witty jokes and has achieved musical fame that spans the Atlantic. He first saw *Daphnis et Chloé* in its full ballet form as a teenager in London. He has his own interpretations of sunrise, his own experiences with morning. During the rehearsal week in September — 10 months after he selected it — he begins to study the score again. He begins to study Ravel again, to understand what the Frenchman was thinking, feeling, believing when he wrote the score for this piece of music. Llewellyn wants to understand all of this because he doesn't want anything lost in translation — and there is a lot to be translated, with a French composer's masterpiece, conducted by a Welsh conductor, played by American musicians, for an audience of North Carolinians. In rehearsals, Llewellyn tells his orchestra the stories behind the music. He talks about Maurice Ravel as if he's alive, standing beside him. In order to play this complex music, the musicians must know it, Llewellyn believes.

Finally on the night of the show, after every note has been rehearsed, after every story has been told, after all of the preparation that has gone into this piece dating back to the first sunrise Maurice Ravel ever saw, Llewellyn will lift his baton in the air and suck in one breath. And just before the music is reborn, just before the birds and the brook and the sun, for one brief heartbeat in Raleigh's Meymandi Concert Hall, there will be total silence.

The N.C. Symphony's concertmaster plays a violin that is 250 years old; he's played that instrument with Yo-Yo Ma. The harpist has more than 20 harps, some from Ireland, all with strings made of cow guts. The bass trombone player is married to a viola player. A young violinist is from Raleigh and wanted to move as far away from Raleigh as she possibly could and never come back to Raleigh — until she got her first job after college with the N.C. Symphony, based in Raleigh.

Behind each instrument, as is true with each piece of music, is a person with a story. The orchestra itself has its own story. It was born in 1932, with a man named Lamar Stringfield organizing a group of volunteers on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A decade later, the State Legislature became the nation's first to guarantee state funds to support a state symphony.

One of the symphony's greatest accomplishments is its education series, which takes the music and the artists into classrooms around the state. If you mention the symphony to most native North Carolinians, they'll say they remember it from a concert the symphony performed at their elementary school. Some of the longest-serving musicians with the N.C. Symphony have played for more than 1 million schoolchildren.

If you dive into any piece of this music, this classical music, you could swim for hours and never see all of the life under the sea of bows and horns and drums.

But what is most amazing about it is the completed product. In few other arenas can an audience witness such precise timing among such a collection of individuals. It's as though each person's story led him to play these exact notes at these exact times.

During the summer of 1985, a young Welshman who wanted to conduct music came to America and studied under an old Yankee who was arguably the most successful classical musician in our country's history. Everything about the orchestra is dependent upon some kind of unexplainable artistic chemistry that exists between people, and their relationship was no different. The old man liked the young man so much that when he died, Leonard Bernstein left Grant Llewellyn one of his prized possessions — the case to his conductor's baton.



“Music is not something sterile. ... It's available to every one of us, no matter what language or culture we may come from.”

— Grant Llewellyn

The case isn't made of crystal or bulletproof glass. It's just a wooden box with a soft green cover that's torn down the center. But the important thing is that it was Leonard Bernstein's case, and it stored Leonard Bernstein's batons, which makes it something like the suitcase that started some of the greatest musical trips our American ears have ever taken.

Bernstein was the longtime conductor of the New York Philharmonic, and he led some of the world's best orchestras. He also was a composer, a craft which led him

to his most commercially successful project, *West Side Story*. And every time he conducted anything — his work or someone else’s — he pulled a baton from that case, raised it in front of an orchestra, took a breath, and took off.

That breath, that pause, has been present in music for centuries. It is the moment just before the sound, the moment when the conductor’s body rises and his orchestra takes its final resting beat, the silent prelude to the release of music written years and centuries ago by people long since dead, music that will come from modern artists, music that we as an audience can receive however we want — we are but today’s interpreters, after all — music that stands against time because it has been handed down with care, note by note and case by case.

“Music is not something sterile,” says Llewellyn, sitting outside Meymandi Concert Hall earlier this year. “Even an opera or a play — or certainly a painting, literature, or poetry — there it is on the page. Words are words. But there’s something so much less tangible about a sound or combination of sounds. It’s both the most accessible language in the world and the most complex. It’s available to every one of us, no matter what language or culture we

may come from. But it is still wonderfully elusive.”

Llewellyn has been chasing music his entire life. Since studying under Bernstein, he’s served as principal conductor of numerous orchestras, including the Royal Flanders Philharmonic. He’s been a guest conductor for the Royal Philharmonic and also dozens of orchestras in North America, from Boston to Kansas City to Toronto.

But since 2004, one of his primary jobs has been to serve as music director of our symphony in North Carolina. He’s only the fifth full-time music director in the 80-year history of the N.C. Symphony. Stringfield was the first, Benjamin Swalin followed from 1939 to 1972, John Gosling followed that from 1972 to 1980, and Gerhardt Zimmermann led the symphony from 1982 to 2003.

Llewellyn, who has four children, spends about 15 weeks of the year here overseas from his family, and most of that time is spent traveling. Unlike most symphonies, which stay at their concert halls the majority of the season, the N.C. Symphony moves.

“This orchestra is a treasure,” Llewellyn says. “I don’t think there’s an orchestra quite like it.”



The N.C. Symphony, shown here playing at the Raleigh Amphitheater, increased in size by nearly 50 percent to bring its conductor’s vision to life.

Every year the N.C. Symphony plays a “Holiday Pops” series concert in Lincolnton, a town of about 10,000 people about 40 miles west of Charlotte. Every year the people in town supply a spread of sweets and punch.

“The musicians don’t even want to go back on stage because their fingers are sticky,” says Rob Maddrey, the senior director of statewide development.

In Wilkesboro, the community holds a spaghetti dinner.

In Murphy, the symphony was once treated to salmon.

On their way to New Bern, the symphony regularly stops at Wilbur’s Barbecue in Goldsboro.

The symphony has been playing concerts in Moore County since the 1950s.

For an orchestra made up mostly of musicians from somewhere else, the people in the N.C. Symphony know this state as well as anybody.

In the late 1980s, while Llewellyn was learning under Bernstein, another talented musician was playing in another symphony on the western side of Pennsylvania, and he was dreaming of North Carolina.

Brian Reagin was the assistant concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony then. But 10 years earlier, in the late 1970s, he played with the Piedmont Chamber Orchestra from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. That orchestra rehearsed in Winston-Salem and traveled around the Piedmont.

“That was when I made up my mind that this was where I wanted to be,” Reagin says now.

He first applied for an opening with the N.C. Symphony in 1987. He came down for an audition, only to lose out to the full-time concertmaster from Pittsburgh, the same concertmaster he’d played behind for years. But after a year, that man retired from the N.C. Symphony, the slot opened again, and Reagin got the job.

As concertmaster, Reagin ranks not too far behind the conductor in terms of importance to the overall orchestra. His markings determine when the string section’s bows go up, and when they go down. When there is a violin solo, Reagin often takes it.

He plays on a Carcassi violin that was made in Florence, Italy in 1763. He bought the instrument, with the help of his dad, on a trip to Switzerland in 1972. He



A bass and its bow await their moment on the stage for the N.C. Symphony, which was founded in 1932.

was 16 then, and he's had the violin for 40 years — which may seem like a long time, if it wasn't only one-sixteenth of the instrument's life.

He takes it with him everywhere, carrying it in one case that's inside another case. And while he won't say how much it's worth, his violin is one of the most valuable instruments in the N.C. Symphony.

"That's my retirement there," he says.

Catharine Arrowood is not a musician. When she was growing up in Lumberton, she tried out for the choir at her Baptist church, and her voice was so appalling that the choir director told her that she could stay in the choir, she says, "only if I moved my mouth and no sound came out."

Arrowood is now an attorney with an office in a skyscraper in downtown Raleigh. A short woman with short, curly white hair, she grew up on a farm in Robeson County, and her family ran a dry goods shop.

She is not a musician, but she is chair of the N.C. Symphony Society Board.

Last March, the symphony played a concert with Ben Folds Five, a mainstream alternative-rock band from Chapel Hill. In a crowd consisting mostly of people 30 years younger than her, Arrowood says she rocked the night away.

The symphony, she says, is accessible for anyone.

In recent years, the orchestra has played with members of the modern string band Carolina Chocolate Drops and legendary saxophonist Branford Marsalis. In 2007, the symphony went on a "Blue Skies, Red Earth" tour to the mountains and played with several notable North Carolina bluegrass musicians.

Traveling across a state that produced Doc Watson and Earl Scruggs, the N.C. Symphony seems willing to play anything, anywhere.

"The symphony is a basket where we can keep all of those musical traditions," Arrowood says.

In the late 1980s, when Llewellyn was training under Bernstein and Reagin was in Pittsburgh dreaming of North Carolina, a violinist and horn player were born.

First violinist Anaisé Kukelhan is now 25 years old, and principal French horn player Rebekah Daley is 24. This is their first year with the N.C. Symphony.

Kukelhan grew up in Raleigh. She was quiet and shy in school, and her heart always wandered to two places: music and thoughts of moving away and seeing the world. She began playing violin when she was 5. When she graduated from Enloe High School in 2005, she went straight to Rice University in Houston to study the violin. When she graduated, she moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where she started a career as a freelance musician.



Even after 16 years with the N.C. Symphony, Artistic Director William Henry Curry still closely follows along during rehearsals.

But the freelance life was hard. One week, she'd play with the West Virginia Symphony; the next, she'd be with an orchestra from Cincinnati. So this past April when she saw an opening for a violin player with her home state's symphony, she came down to audition.

"I never thought I'd come back here," Kukelhan says.

The audition is one of the most storied practices in music. It is intimidating and expensive. Often, dozens of musicians show up to audition, paying their own way, all competing for one chair. And it is an anonymous process — the musicians play behind a curtain, while the deciding board sits outside and listens. The audition room has carpeted floors, designed to prevent the click-clack of high heels — the board doesn't even want to know if the players are men or women. The prize is a full-time job, something coveted in the music world.

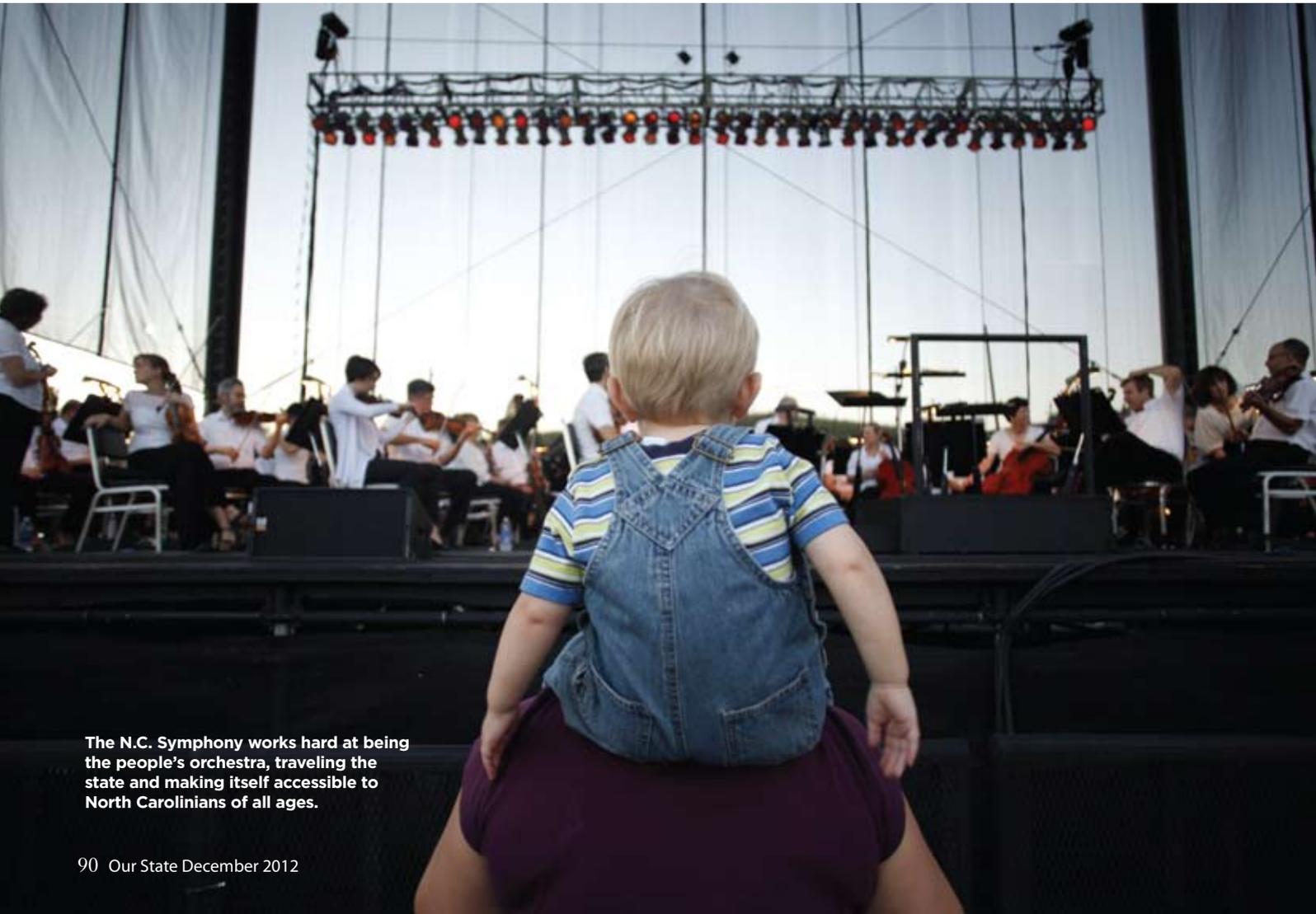
Full-time musicians with the N.C. Symphony are on salary, with benefits. Sandi Macdonald, the president and CEO, says that this orchestra's members make an average of about \$50,000 per year.

Typically, an audition lasts four days, with the field dwindling each day until the finals.

Daley, the young horn player, didn't even bring enough clothes for four days when she came here to audition in April 2011. She didn't think she'd make it that far. So the night before her final round — the curtain comes up for the finals and the board members see the musicians — Daley had to make a quick trip to the mall. She bought a blue top and black cardigan.

Even then, though, Daley's audition wasn't over. After the finals, Llewellyn invited her and two others back to play "trial" weeks. Daley played for a week during the 2011 holiday season, and the entire orchestra provided input on which musician would be hired. Llewellyn decided on Daley shortly after the new year, about eight months after her first audition. This is Daley's first full season, and even as she rehearses Ravel during the opening week in September, she is calm. Nothing she'll experience during the season, she says, could be more stressful than the auditions.

"I'm pretty sure that is the hardest part," Daley says. "I appreciate being treated as a professional now. I still expect to be scolded. But it's nice to know I'm not going to get a bad grade."



The N.C. Symphony works hard at being the people's orchestra, traveling the state and making itself accessible to North Carolinians of all ages.

Terry Mizesko's parents met at a USO dance at Cherry Point. Mizesko's dad was from New York and was one of the first men drafted into World War II. When he retired from the military, he moved with his new wife from Cherry Point to Morehead City, and they raised a family there.

Mizesko's mom was a musician with a beautiful voice, but an operation on her throat cut short her singing days, so she stayed behind the church organ. Her passion was still evident.

When Mizesko was in the 11th grade, a local Morehead City man loaned him a cello, and he's played instruments ever since. Mizesko has been the bass trombone player with the N.C. Symphony for 41 years, but his musical career dates back even further.

After college he taught music at a high school near Greenville. Frustrated with the school's slow process of integrating black and white students, he moved to Smithfield, Virginia, and taught at a mostly black high school. The school had no music in the library, so he and his students wrote their songs. After a few years in Virginia, he moved back to Greenville and started

teaching summer theater. In 1970, he auditioned for the N.C. Symphony and didn't get the part. The next year, music director Benjamin Swalin called Mizesko back, and Mizesko has been here ever since.

"I've played for every conductor in this orchestra except for Lamar Stringfield," he says.

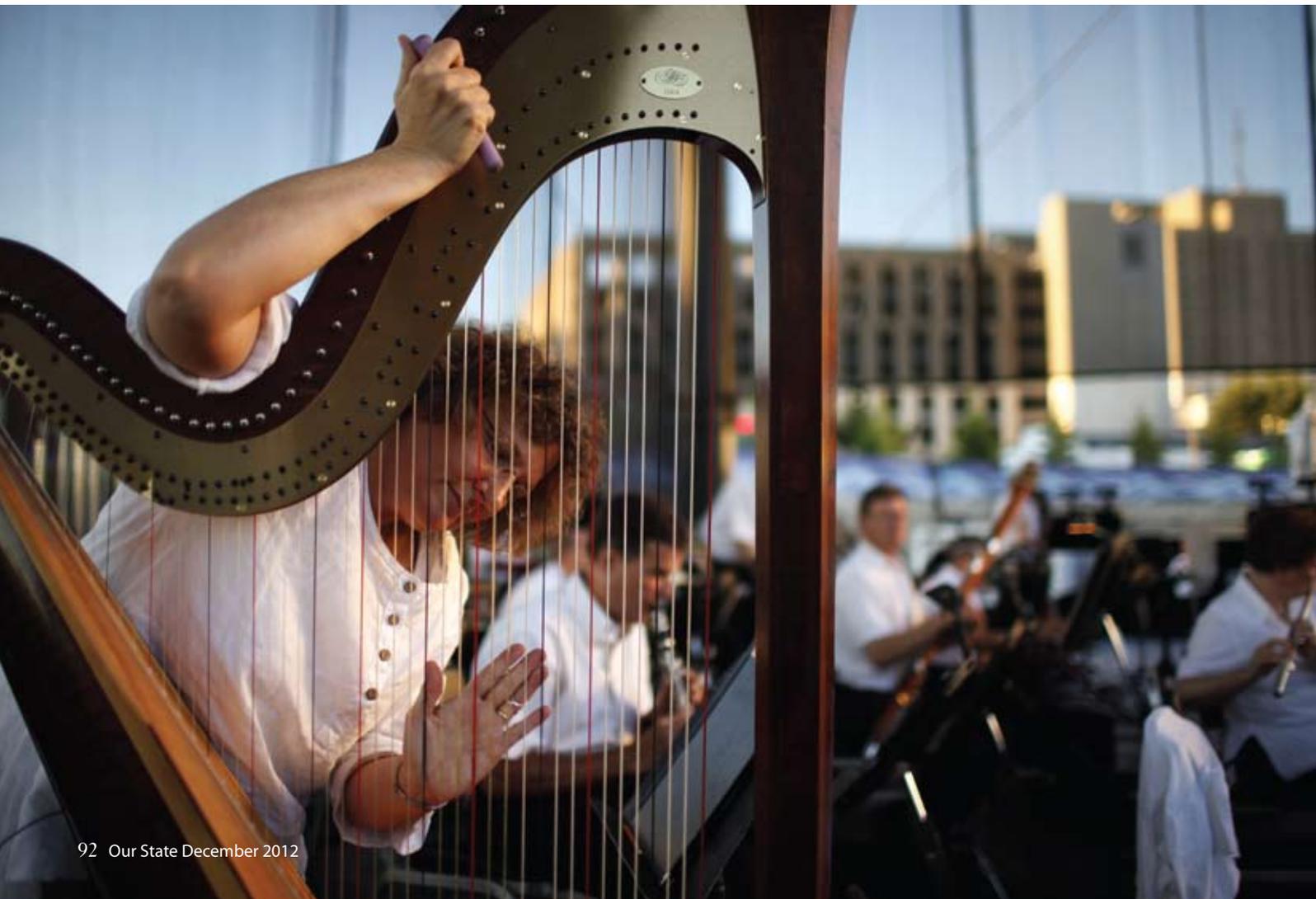
The orchestra was mostly a road band when he started. They'd come to work on Monday mornings, travel around the state during the weeks, and then be home on weekends.

Now they play mostly weekend concerts, and the weeks are reserved for either rehearsing or traveling to play in schools.

Mizesko's most lasting mark on the N.C. Symphony will not be the length of his tenure or even the skillful way he plays the bass trombone. Instead it will be something he wrote.

When the U.S. Open came to Pinehurst in 2005, Mizesko was asked to write a composition for the

Harpist Anita Burroughs-Price tunes her instrument's strings, which are made from cow guts, with care before a concert. She owns more than 20 harps, some all the way from Ireland.





Let us help you with your
charitable goals:

Endowments
Legacy giving

Now — or in the future

Serving North Carolina with offices in
Raleigh and throughout the state

800-201-9533



tournament. Mizesko wrote *Sketches from Pinehurst*, a five-part composition that lasts about 25 minutes if played in full. In it Mizesko tells the story of Pinehurst through music, from the village's founder, James Walker Tufts, to the 1999 U.S. Open champion, Payne Stewart, who died in a plane crash shortly after that tournament and is bronzed in statue form at the 18th hole of the famed No. 2 course.

The first part of the composition is called "The Dream."

In that part, Mizesko sets a scene of sunrise at Pinehurst. Using music, he conveys the quiet image of early morning fog on a golf course. And then the call of a French horn breaks through the morning mist.

It is the second Sunday in September, opening night of the N.C. Symphony's 80th anniversary season, and everybody's here — the conductor, the concertmaster, the rookies, the composer, the board of directors. Even the mayor is here, and she formally declares this week North Carolina Symphony Week in the city of Raleigh.

It is indeed a busy week for the symphony. Starting Tuesday, they'll rehearse the Ravel piece, with the brooks and birds and sunrise, for a big show in Meymandi Concert Hall the following weekend. Nationally renowned pianist Gabriela Montero will be there for the building's first concert of the year.

But tonight, this concert is more fun. This is a "Pops in the City" concert at the newly named outdoor Red Hat Amphitheater in downtown Raleigh. Even Llewellyn will don a red hat by the end of the concert, saying, "I guess that means we're all State fans," in his Welsh accent.

Before the show, Melanie Wilsden, the principal oboe player, plays a note, and the other orchestra members tune their instruments to that sound. The young violinist, Kukelhan, spots her mother out in the crowd. It is her first concert with her home state's symphony. The young horn player, Daley, wipes her mouthpiece.

Llewellyn, wearing street clothes, pops onto stage. He flew in from Wales on Saturday, one day before this show and the big week. After checking to make sure everything is in place, he heads back to the dressing room in a trailer beside the stage. He changes into a white sports coat and a bow tie. He pulls his baton from the case — the same case Leonard Bernstein gave him.

And then the music director of the N.C. Symphony bounds onto the stage, lifts his baton, and takes that one last breath of silence.

The music starts.

The band plays the first notes to the Overture. It is a song that was first performed in 1956 as part of the operetta *Candide*. The composer of the song was Leonard Bernstein. Llewellyn calls him Lenny.

Two songs later, the orchestra plays "Building a Community." It was written in 2004. It is the first part of the composition *Sketches from Pinehurst*. The composer was Terry Mizesko, who's sitting on stage.

Later, Llewellyn announces that the next song will be particularly appropriate. The orchestra starts playing the first notes; they're of "The Old North State," the official state song. It was written in 1927 by William Gaston.

Then during the middle of the state song, this man from Wales whose musical genius spans two continents turns away from his orchestra made up of all kinds of people with all kinds of stories. The band stops playing. And Llewellyn faces the crowd of North Carolinians, raises his baton, and leads

the audience in the chorus:

"Hurrah! Hurrah! The Good
Old North State!"

Michael Graff is the writer-at-large
for *Our State* magazine. His most
recent stories were "Saying Grace" and
"Columbia" (November 2012).

N.C. Symphony December Events

December 1st 8 p.m.,
December 2nd 3 p.m.

Messiah
Meymandi Concert Hall,
Raleigh

December 4th 7:30 p.m.
Statewide Holiday Pops
Hayworth Fine Arts Center,
High Point

December 5th 7:30 p.m.
Statewide Holiday Pops
Statesville Civic Center,
Statesville

December 6th 8 p.m.
Statewide Holiday Pops
James W. Warren Citizens Center,
Lincolnton

December 7th 7:30 p.m.
Statewide Holiday Pops
The Walker Center,
Wilkesboro

December 8th 11 a.m.
Music Makers — NCS Kids
Marbles Kids Museum,
Raleigh

December 11th 8 p.m.
Holiday Pops — Wilmington Series
Kenan Auditorium,
Wilmington

December 12th 8 p.m.
Holiday Pops
Keihin Auditorium,
Tarboro

December 13th 7:30 p.m.
Holiday Pops — New Bern Series
New Bern Riverfront Convention Center,
New Bern

December 21st 8 p.m.

December 22nd 3 p.m., 8 p.m.
Holiday Pops: A Pink Martini Christmas
Meymandi Concert Hall,
Raleigh

December 31st 8 p.m.
Vienna with a Twist (special event)
Meymandi Concert Hall,
Raleigh

This...
is High Country!

LIVE THE DREAM
Find a Local REALTOR at
WWW.HIGHCOUNTRYREALTORS.ORG

High Country REALTORS
SERVING ASHE, AVERY, & WATAUGA COUNTIES
& SURROUNDING AREAS OF NORTH CAROLINA'S HIGH COUNTRY

our
holiday
gift
to you

50% Off Frames
with the purchase of lenses.

Hundreds of styles to choose from, including fashion and designer frames. Visit your local eyecarecenter today for this limited time offer. Season's Greetings, from our family to yours.

eyecarecenter
Doctors Focused on You.

For a location nearest to you, call toll free: 800.968.3937
or visit us on the web: www.eyecarecenter.com

May not be combined with insurance benefits, coupons, discounts or any other offer. Other restrictions may apply. Excludes contact lenses. Adult assistance please accepted, including ID/MI/CO and WAJ/SD/ND or North Carolina. 2014/11/18/19/20. ©2014 Eyecarecenter, Inc. All rights reserved. Let our expertise guide you to your ideal, helping maximize your eyecare benefits.