

Great Lakes Trombone Ensemble performs at Drinko Hall.

by Jeremy Reynolds



Two trombones led the opening melody of Giovanni Gabrieli's *Jubilate Deo* with seven more close at hand to join in the counterpoint. On Tuesday, June 9 the Great Lakes Trombone Ensemble delivered a program of fanfares, folk tunes, film music and more in Drinko Hall at Cleveland State University.

The group comprises members of The Cleveland Orchestra, the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Detroit Symphony, the Pittsburg Symphony, the Rochester Philharmonic, Toledo Symphony, and faculty members from Akron and Cleveland State University. The Ensemble performed during the annual Cleveland Trombone Seminar, which Cleveland assistant principal trombone Shachar Israel initiated in 2011.

The nonet followed up *Jubilate Deo* with another work by Gabrieli, the *Canzon Septimi Toni No. 2*. The musicians performed the antiphony magnificently. Though they weren't always precise with their rhythms as a group, the rock-solid intonation of each harmonic cadence rang with a sensational purity of sound.

Unlike the equal temperament of a piano or even the more consonant of an orchestra — which has many different timbres completing its chords — the Great Lakes Trombone Ensemble members melded their tones flawlessly, their overtones adding a satisfactory “zing” to the chords.

Israel stepped to the fore to introduce the ensemble and the next work, “Dido’s Lament from Henry Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*. He added that the first half of the program would be devoted entirely to European composers while the second would consist only of American music. James Nova (Pittsburg Symphony) provided the arrangement. Bass trombonists Jeff Dee (Buffalo Philharmonic) and Jeff Grey (Rochester Philharmonic) laid down passacaglia bass line as the rest of the Ensemble added layers of

countermelody. Israel played soprano trombone to complete the choir, adding an extra octave above the others.

The entire section of the Buffalo Philharmonic was represented as Jonathan Lombardo and Tim Smith joined Dee to perform arrangements of three short trios by Jean Hennebelle, Robert Lannoy, and Marcel Cariven. The musicians' impeccable timing spoke to their experience performing together in the orchestra.

After playing Gordon Jacob's somewhat lackluster *Trombone Octet* — a piece based on British folk tunes — and a brief intermission, the Ensemble turned to Walter Hartley's succinct *Canzona for 8 Trombones* with renewed vigor. They followed up with Andrew Skaggs *Lake Effects*, a work remarkable for its orchestra-like effects and symphonic scope. Each member had a turn to shine by taking the lead before falling back into Skaggs's repetitive, undulating syncopations.

Israel stepped to the front of the ensemble again, this time to publicly congratulate David Bruestle (formerly Erie Philharmonic) for his recent appointment to the Virginia Symphony. He then introduced Allen Chase's *Rondo for Eight Trombones*, asking listeners to take note of the complex polyrhythms and extreme dissonances. The Cleveland conductor led his fellow brass players through the difficult rondo, which they finished with rousing energy, though the different sections occasionally got a little off from one another.

Speaking amiably to the audience, Nova introduced the remaining members of the Ensemble: Ken Thompkins (Detroit Symphony), and Garth Simmons (Toledo Symphony) before discussing the final work on the program.

"Since Yoda is a teaching character, this is dedicated to all of the teachers," Nova said before joining his colleagues to perform his own arrangement of John Williams's "Yoda's Theme" from *The Empire Strikes Back*. Unlike the rest of the music, this work sounded under-rehearsed. Balances were bass heavy, and intonation often took time to lock in.

The obvious encore made for a perfect ending: Williams's "Imperial March" from the same film — another Nova arrangement. Combining virtuosic triple tonguing with an appropriately nefarious attitude, the Great Lakes Trombone Ensemble demonstrated that they know how to put on a good show.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 11, 2015.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)

