

Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra: a conversation with concerto competition winner Charlie Jones

by Mike Telin



A highlight of each Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra season is the concert featuring the annual concerto competition winner. On Saturday, May 5 at 8:00 pm at Severance Hall, trumpeter Charlie Jones will join his COYO colleagues in a performance of Haydn's *Trumpet Concerto* under the direction of Vinay Parameswaran. The program will also include Beethoven's *Overture to Coriolan*, Danielpour's *Toward a Splendid City* and Lutosławski's *Concerto for Orchestra*. Tickets are available [online](#).

A resident of Hinckley, Jones is a senior at Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy. The eighteen-year-old has been a member of COYO's trumpet section since the 2015-16 season. In addition to his orchestra duties, he has played with the ensemble's brass quintet since 2016. In the fall, Jones will be attending the New England Conservatory and studying trumpet performance with Steven Emery.

We caught up with Charlie Jones by telephone and began our conversation by asking him why he chose Haydn's concerto.

Charlie Jones: In my opinion, the concerto is an ideal piece for the instrument. Because it's from the earlier Classical period, it's technically on the simpler side. And you hear some of Haydn's best musical skills shine throughout the piece. It's very elegant, light, and there are moments that are very exciting and beautiful. It has an overall musical significance that I completely enjoy, and unlike a lot of the trumpet repertoire, it doesn't try to be a showoff piece.

Mike Telin: Because it is a concerto that everybody knows, does that add any additional pressure during a performance?

CJ: Everybody does have their favorite recording that they know and love. So the difficulty is trying to figure out how you can sound like all those amazing recordings while staying true to your interpretation, as well as being as historically accurate as possible. I have to go all-in with my musical choices and commit to them. And that take some of the pressure off.

MT: I understand that the piece was written for a very different trumpet than most people use today.

CJ: The history of the trumpet in this concerto is fascinating. During the Baroque era, trumpets were simply a metal tube, a mouthpiece, and a bell. There were no valves. The keyed trumpet was the first attempt at making an instrument that was able to play multiple octaves and a chromatic scale — they added keys similar to those on the bassoon, and this allowed you to play all the notes in the low, middle, and high registers. Although that instrument never really took off after this concerto was written — it was out of tune and didn't work as well as was hoped — it was the trumpet that inspired the later instruments with valves.

MT: What type of instrument will you be using?

CJ: It's a piston valve trumpet in the key of E-flat, which is pretty standard for 21st-century performances of the piece.

MT: Have you performed this or any other concerto with orchestra before?

CJ: This is my first time performing any concerto with an orchestra, so it's very exciting.

MT: How are the rehearsals going?

CJ: Absolutely wonderful! It's been a thrill. I'm lucky to be able to play in an ensemble like COYO. Every week people come in very well-prepared and ready to work. What they are doing is inspiring to me, and it's easy to get in front of them and make music together.

MT: Did you talk through the score with Vinay Parameswaran?

CJ: I had a lovely talk with Vinay. He's not a trumpet player, but he's very aware of how different instruments work. I talked about places in the concerto that are more difficult for me because of the muscular involvement, and he knew exactly what that meant and was able to help. He also knows the piece and the style very well. It was interesting to hear what he had to say about Haydn's music and how to approach it stylistically, and how to combine all that I know about the solo part with the big picture of the orchestra.

MT: For those who don't know, can you explain how brass instruments work?

CJ: First, if I'm not pressing down on any valves when I blow into the instrument, I will get a certain note. I had to learn how to control my air — if it's more compressed and fast, and I use the same valve combination, the note goes higher. If I slow down my air and open my mouth, I get a lower note. There are seven combinations between the three valves, and between those I can play through the entire register of the instrument.

MT: Did you study the piece with your teacher(s)?

CJ: I worked a lot with my primary teacher Loren Toplitz at CIM prep. I've also had excellent lessons and coachings with Michael Miller and Lyle Steelman from The Cleveland Orchestra. They've given me great technical and musical advice.

MT: This will be your final COYO concert: do you have any special memories?

CJ: The biggest thing that comes to mind is at the beginning of my second year, we played Bruckner 4 and I was assigned the principal part. It was my first time playing principal with the orchestra, and it was a massive undertaking for us. It was particularly memorable because we had a full side-by-side rehearsal with The Cleveland Orchestra. It was nerve-racking because it is a giant piece, but it was such a valuable experience to not only learn more about that piece but also how to play in an orchestra.

MT: What are your other musical or artistic interests?

CJ: I've played piano for a very long time. I love it and I hope to continue. I recently took up singing, which has been more of an extracurricular hobby, but I've noticed that many of the greatest brass musicians talk about singing or are singers. Artistically, I'm a huge fan of musical theater. I did a lot of stage acting when I was in middle and early high school. I love taking a script and telling the story. And similar to why I enjoy playing in an orchestra, I love collaborating with large groups

of people. I try to see as much theater as I can, and I currently volunteer at a local theater where I have a lot of colleagues who I adore working with. I've also taken up stage management and lighting design just for fun.

MT: Do you have any plans to continue this in Boston?

CJ: Right now I want focus on the trumpet, but I do want to go to a lot of theater. The Boston Conservatory is right across the street, which is one of the top musical theater schools in the country, and I have friends who are going there so I want to see as many of their shows as possible. It's fun and I want to stay interested.

MT: What are your aspirations for the future?

CJ: First is to go off to school and learn as much as possible from the amazing faculty at NEC. I would love to play in a professional orchestra. I enjoy how collaborative it is to be in an ensemble with a hundred people. But in the end, I just want to be playing the trumpet, working with people, and making music.

MT: Final question, do you come from a musical family?

CJ: My dad has some piano skills and he gave me my first lessons — besides that, no. But I'm very lucky to have all of their support and dedication for doing what I do.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 1, 2018.

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