

## BlueWater Chamber Orchestra: 15 minutes with oboist Martin Neubert

by Jarrett Hoffman



If you've been to an orchestra concert in the area over the last 26 years, you've probably heard Martin Neubert's playing.

Since receiving his master's from the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1992, the oboist has become a mainstay of the region's music scene. He's principal of the BlueWater Chamber Orchestra, Warren Philharmonic, and Opera Western Reserve, and second in the Cleveland Pops Orchestra and Cleveland Chamber Symphony. On top of that, he's substituted with The Cleveland Orchestra, and performed with the symphonies of Akron, Canton, and Youngstown.

In short, he's been around.

This weekend, Neubert will step out from the BlueWater ranks to perform as soloist, joining guest conductor Tiffany Chang for her debut with the Orchestra. The program is titled "Opulent Oboe and Scintillating Symphony" — the opulence coming from German-American composer Lukas Foss's Concerto, the scintillation from Haydn's *Symphony No. 103 in E-flat*, "Drumroll." Apologies to Beethoven for missing out on the fun adjectives, but his Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Op. 43 should make for a strong opener.

The Orchestra takes to Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights for the first performance, on Saturday, November 10 at 7:30 pm (get tickets [here](#)). Then they're off to Pilgrim Church in Tremont on Sunday, November 11 at 4:00 pm to continue their series of free outreach concerts in Westside neighborhoods. The performance is sponsored by Cuyahoga Arts and Culture.

I recently reached Neubert by phone at his oboe studio in Chagrin Falls, and we began by talking about the rarely heard Foss Concerto.

*Jarrett Hoffman: How long have you known this piece?*

Martin Neubert: I inherited a signed copy from someone, but I had never listened to it before. Tiffany Chang came up with the program, and I was asked if I would like to play it. I listened to it and I said, yes of course. I really liked it right away as a standalone piece — not just because of oboe. It features lots of different wind and string players, so it's very collaborative.

*JH: Foss's style has been compared to that of Hindemith, who taught him at Yale. Is that a comparison you would make as well?*

MN: I do hear a lot of Hindemith. The contrapuntal feeling of the first movement is similar to his Oboe Sonata. Foss also went to school with Bernstein — they were contemporaries — and you can hear that influence a little bit. And at the very end of the last movement, where it's just crazy and chaotic, it sounds sort of like a Prokofiev piano concerto.

*JH: Foss doesn't give the soloist much time to settle in — pretty much right off the bat, you're playing a long high note.*

MN: Yes, you're just hanging out there. When I first listened to it, it sounded like the very beginning of your stereotypical 20th-century solo oboe piece, going from high to low and moving all around. But he tries to catch the listener very quickly.

*JH: The second movement might be the best-known. It's based on a folk song, and there's also the challenging cadenza.*

MN: I think the slow movement is just a mini-masterpiece. It starts out with this beautiful and lyrical folk song, and you have to play very simply. Then out of nowhere, it goes into a dreamlike state that's very melismatic and rhapsodic. And somehow after the cadenza, it comes out of the dream.

*JH: Tell me about the finale.*

MN: It's almost like there are all these little sections that demonstrate different things that the oboe can do, like parts of a figure skating routine. As I'm going along, I'm like — okay, I checked that off. And the ending is just really exciting.

*JH: What's the hardest part about performing this piece?*

MN: Because of the counterpoint in the first movement, it can be difficult not just to come in correctly but to make it sound cohesive and smooth. But for me, what's most challenging is making that rhapsodic section of the second movement sound like a dream — ethereal and smooth — with the strings so light underneath that. And I just like the slow movement so much, so I want to do it justice.

*JH: We're looking forward to hearing you play it. Getting into your background as a musician here in Cleveland, when did you join BlueWater?*

MN: I've been there from the very beginning in 2010. We've played some great pieces, and it's exciting to play with such fine musicians. I wish we could perform even more frequently.

*JH: I understand you've soloed with BlueWater before.*

MN: I played the Barber *Capricorn Concerto* for trumpet, flute, and oboe. And I've played the Bach Double for violin and oboe with other orchestras, and Copland's *Quiet City*, but this is actually the first time I'll be performing a concerto by myself, which is exciting.

*JH: You've been part of the Cleveland music scene for a long time. How have you seen it change?*

MN: For me personally, when I first started out, I would drive further out — like to Roanoke — to perform. But the older I get, the more I'm playing shows in town. Looking at the city in general, some groups have ceased to exist, but those weren't usually the groups I was part of. We had the Ballet and the Opera — lots of larger groups — and it seems now we have the one large group and then many smaller groups. That's how I've seen it evolve.

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