

**A mime speaks:
getting to know Magic Circle Mime Co.
before they perform with Cleveland Orchestra**

by Jarrett Hoffman



In the music business, we've all heard and rolled our eyes at music jokes. Mime jokes might be the breath of fresh air we need.

"I can tell you my favorite one," Douglas MacIntyre, co-founder of [Magic Circle Mime Co.](#), said over the phone. "It was a [cartoon](#) in *The New Yorker* — a drawing of a

very high-end suite in a high-rise looking out over Central Park. Right in the center of it is a mime sitting in an imaginary chair. And it just says, 'Executive Mime.'"

Maybe that kind of thing is common mime banter that makes *them* roll their eyes (very theatrically, of course). But here's something that should be fresh for all the mimes, musicians, and fans on either side: mime + orchestra.

That's what Magic Circle and The Cleveland Orchestra have in store this Friday, February 8 at 7:30 pm at Severance Hall. Vinay Parameswaran will lead the Orchestra in a Family Concert titled "The Mozart Experience," which brings together the visual theater of Magic Circle with excerpts from *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, *The Magic Flute*, *Don Giovanni*, the "Jupiter" Symphony, and other famous works by Mozart.



Joining MacIntyre onstage will be his fellow Magic Circle co-founder, Maggie Petersen (*above*). Both have backgrounds in theater as well as music — MacIntyre as a hornist, Petersen as a pianist.

The company has been around since 1978, but MacIntyre traced its origins back even earlier to an opportunity he received with the Spokane Symphony not long after graduating from college. The music director at the time, Donald Thulean, wanted MacIntyre to help develop the orchestra’s educational concerts, which would tour all over the region, often performing at high schools.

“You’re in a gymnasium with a portable shell — it’s a hard place to do a concert,” MacIntyre said. “It was the conductor’s idea that if we could bring a theatrical aspect to a program, it would help young audiences focus. And of course, I jumped on the chance. I was fresh out of school and looking for work.”

MacIntyre set about writing a show, then toured it with the Symphony. “And that’s an experience that I just don’t think is available that much anymore,” he said. “I spent so much time with them that they really trained me and taught me how to work within the format of a professional orchestra.”

That same year, MacIntyre was introduced to Petersen, which proved timely. The musicians wanted to pull a gag on the conductor during the final concert of the tour, and they wanted MacIntyre to plan it. His new friend came to mind. So at one point in the

concert, MacIntyre's character — a hopeful-opera-singer of a mime — tapped on a drum case, and out popped his surprise accompanist.

It might seem scary to prank a conductor, but this one was game. "He actually said, 'Gee, that worked great, let's do a show next year with two mimes,'" MacIntyre remembered. "So that was the first time Maggie and I worked together."



From there, word got out, and a call came in from another orchestra hoping to enlist the actors' talents. The duo decided to get more proactive. They approached the Seattle Symphony, writing two shows for them before becoming resident artists of the orchestra. "And that was too good to pass up," MacIntyre said. That served as a springboard to two shows written for the Mostly Mozart Festival, including this Friday's Mozart-themed program.

One big surprise as the company grew was international opportunities, which have now brought them to four other continents. "That was something we just didn't see coming at all, and it's been a wonderful change," MacIntyre said. "As mimes we don't speak in many languages, so we've worked really hard at getting good translations," he joked.

Has the mime profession changed over the course of the company's life? "When we started, it was kind of the heyday of at least the Americans' discovery of Marcel Marceau," MacIntyre said. "Mime was a very big deal in theater programs at the time. I trained a lot in mime, and when I graduated it was a hot market. But as you well know, it

went downhill in popularity. As often happens, things get overdone a little bit or just slip in the popular imagination.”



But MacIntyre (*left*) has also seen a rebirth of mime in many different styles. “When people talk about mime, they tend to picture the Marcel Marceau whiteface and illusionary gestures — which is terrific, it’s wonderful. But mime is actually more like dance in that there are just so many different forms of it. Maggie and I always considered ourselves of the American School — you know, the Charlie Chaplins and the Buster Keatons, and of course the Marx Brothers, who were such wonderful physical characters in comedy, yet were very musical. I would say Harpo was the epitome of how we like to work.

We’re interested in the characters that we build. We do use illusionary techniques at times, but for the most part we’re silent characters who have an interest in music and the orchestra.”

In closing, one more mime joke. Reading from his bulletin board, MacIntyre gave me the scene of a Far Side [cartoon](#). “There’s a mime and some wild game out on the Savannah, and there are two hunters. One hunter turns to the other and says, ‘Situation’s changed, Jules. Take my buffalo gun and hand me my mime rifle.’ I can’t think of any others right off the bat, but whenever one surfaces somewhere, I have friends who are sure to send it to me.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com February 4, 2019.

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