

## Heights Chamber Orchestra: getting to know Dean Buck

by Jarrett Hoffman



Dean Buck grew up on the West Side of Cleveland, then headed to New York City for four years of school and five years of work. Now he's back, pursuing a master's in conducting at the Cleveland Institute of Music and digging into the city's freelance scene.

Two things he's enjoyed since being back? For one, the cost of living. "You have substantially less rent to make each month," he said, laughing. And two, the music scene. "It's fun — there are some great groups and great people. I'm almost wary about saying how good it is here because it's like, oh no, everyone's going to come."

Having led a couple of workshop performances during Cleveland Opera Theater's {NOW} Festival in recent weeks, next up for Buck is a guest conducting opportunity with Heights Chamber Orchestra. What stands out most on that program on Sunday, February 24 at 3:30 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church: a concerto for the Wagner tuba.

No shame if you've never heard of it. It's a rare — and frankly, beautiful — cross-breeding of trombone and French horn, originally created for the Ring Cycle and generally played by hornists. ([Here's](#) a video of Baltimore Symphony associate principal horn Gabrielle Finck playing a Wagner tuba tune from Bruckner 8.)



Stephen Caudel's *Edel Rhapsody* for Wagner tuba will feature Tren Cheshier, who teaches horn at Cleveland State University in addition to holding the principal chair of that section in Heights Chamber Orchestra. The work was his choice, but as Buck told him, "Let's go for it."

A second solo piece, Mozart's *Exsultate, Jubilate*, will star soprano Angela Mortellaro. "Any opportunity to work with her, you take it," Buck said. "She's such a great singer and just a good person, so I said, 'Anything you want to do, I will happily do.'"



The concert opens with the Overture to Verdi's *La forza del destino* and closes with Satie's *Parade*. "Everyone knows Satie for the *Gymnopédies*, but this is a far different side of him," Buck said. "It's another one of those crazy, early-20th century meetings of the minds. It was a ballet conceived by Jean Cocteau. Satie did the music, and Picasso did the costumes. It's a great piece — really funny and really cool at different points. And it's good for a community orchestra because it gives people who don't encounter early modernist or early avant-garde rep a chance to play a piece like that."

Buck called Satie "an unsung hero" of that era. "He was very close with people like Marcel Duchamp and the Dada crowd. And John Cage loved Satie. He kind of gets overlooked for his contribution to the early avant-garde."

And the *Forza del destino* Overture? "I mean, there isn't much that I can say that hasn't been said, aside from the fact that Verdi is about as good as music gets," Buck said.

In closing, a little more Cleveland chat: Buck told me he's enjoyed studying with Carl Topilow at CIM. "He's a great teacher — really old school, no B.S. He knows what your weaknesses are and will definitely make you address them, but he's not a jerk about it. He's a very good human being."

Next on the docket: conducting the Suburban Symphony in March, and just a couple of months later graduating from CIM. But that won't be the end of Buck's time in Cleveland. He plans to stick around for at least another year, which will include more work with Cleveland Opera Theater — and maybe pressing pause a few times to enjoy another local perk.

"After nine years in New York, it's really nice to live somewhere where I can get in my car, drive ten minutes, and be in the middle of real nature." Just one qualifier: "There is the added complication of needing to have that extra bit of cash for when something inevitably goes wrong with your car," he said. "You travel a bit more, but I like it here."

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