

Chagrin Arts: fusing art and music with bassoonist Barry Stees

by Jarrett Hoffman



Inside every artist's brain is a region where the words of their mentors float around like balloons, even years or decades later. During a recent phone call, bassoonist [Barry Stees](#) looked back on one such piece of advice from the late K. David Van Hoesen, his former teacher at the Eastman School of Music.

“He was always encouraging us to read literature, view art, and take in other forms of culture to fill in the context behind the music we were learning,” said Stees, who serves as assistant principal

bassoon in The Cleveland Orchestra.

That stuck with him. And now, he's developed a concert program themed around music and the visual art and artists that inspired it. He'll bring that to life with pianist Randall Fusco, oboist Cynthia Watson Sperl, and the Callisto Quartet at Chagrin Falls United Methodist Church this Friday, April 26 at 7:30 pm as part of the [Chagrin Arts](#) series. Visual art will be displayed on the walls, and shown on projections.

The biggest draw of the evening: a world premiere by Jeffrey Rathbun titled *Shapes for Bassoon and Piano*, paired with knitted images and video by Stees' wife, fiber artist [Melinda K.P. Stees](#). Cleveland Orchestra fans will know that in addition to being a composer, Rathbun serves as assistant principal oboe in that ensemble. “It's a nice family collaboration — Jeff's a good friend and colleague of mine, so I'm really excited about it,” Barry Stees said.

Other pairings of composers and visual artists include Jiří Trtík with Russian expressionist Wassily Kandinsky, Daniel Baldwin with landscape painter Frederic Edwin Church, Désiré Dihau with French impressionist Edgar Degas, and Jenni Brandon with photographer Paul Schwendener.

But for composer Susan Kander, one pairing with visual art wasn't enough. She needed four: each movement of her *Museum Pieces* for bassoon and string quartet was inspired by a favorite work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York by Modigliani, Vermeer, and Breughel, in addition to an ancient sculpture.

Slightly different in inspiration is Paul Moravec's *Andy Warhol Sez*. "Each movement is preceded by a short, pithy saying by Warhol that the performer reads," Stees said. "It'll be a lot of fun for the audience. And I've chosen to show video clips of him and his inner circle in the 1960s in Greenwich village — they made a bunch of home movies."

And if that weren't enough art for Stees to have on his mind, when we spoke last week, he was actually in his car on the way to see the Gordon Parks photography exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art. It was a good opportunity for Stees — the Orchestra was off for the week after its Asian tour, and he didn't even have his bassoon to practice — it hadn't yet cleared customs coming back.

Another travel-related bummer: "I'm pretty jet-lagged," he said. "It's a 12-hour time difference between here and Beijing, so I'm kind of messed up. They say it takes a day for each hour of jet lag to get acclimated — I'm hoping it won't be that long."

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 23, 2019.

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