

Cleveland Chamber Music Society closes 69th season with hornist William Caballero

by Daniel Hathaway



Although string quartets normally dominate its guest list, the Cleveland Chamber Music Society will take a different tack for the finale of its 69th season. William Caballero, principal horn of the Pittsburgh Symphony for the last 29 seasons, will bring two of his orchestra colleagues along to Forest Hills Presbyterian Church on Tuesday, April 30 for an unusual program of chamber music.

The 7:30 pm concert will feature Caballero and pianist Rodrigo Ojeda in Eugène Bozza's *En Foret*, Anthony Plog's *Three Miniatures*, Oliver Knussen's *Horn Concerto*, and an arrangement of Johannes Brahms' *Intermezzo in A*, Op. 118, No. 2. Pittsburgh Symphony principal oboe Cynthia DeAlmeida will join the party for Carl Reinecke's *Trio for Piano, Oboe and Horn* in a, Op. 188.

In a recent phone interview, Caballero said, "My last full recital was in 2002 — I usually only play half recitals for workshops, or split recitals with colleagues. So I wanted to choose some repertoire for Cleveland that I hadn't played before."

The hornist decided to begin with the Bozza piece, which he *has* performed on occasion, because it makes a good overture to the recital as well as showcasing what the horn can do: "Play high, low, fast, slow, sustained, trills, stopped, open. It's fun for the listener, and a challenge for the pianist."

Composer and trumpeter Anthony Plog has been a colleague and friend for several years, Caballero said. "I participated in Summit Brass in the late '80s and early '90s, and we played quite a bit of his music. I premiered and recorded his Horn Quartet with Gail Williams, Thomas Bacon, and William Barnewitz in 2009, and was always

intrigued by the short works he wrote for brass instruments. Here was my opportunity to learn his *Three Miniatures*.”

Oliver Knussen’s *Horn Concerto* represents an indelible memory for Caballero. “In 2001 or 2002, the Pittsburgh Symphony was about to premiere Knussen’s *Violin Concerto* with Pinchas Zuckerman, but Ollie hadn’t completed it yet. I got a phone call two days before the concert asking me if I could learn the Horn Concerto in 48 hours. I said, ‘Sure — for an outrageous amount of money!’”

Although Caballero didn’t get rich from the project, he did learn and perform the work, and he’s eager to play it again, even with a piano reduction that can only approximate the colors of an orchestra. “I think that Ollie Knussen was an amazing composer. I really like this piece, and I want Cleveland to enjoy it too.”

The inclusion of Brahms’ A-Major Intermezzo from Op. 118, originally for piano, was inspired by a student performance Caballero heard in an arrangement for horn and harp. “I couldn’t believe how beautiful it was.” Caballero thinks that Brahms would have approved because of his appreciation for the horn, and the Intermezzo also makes a stylistic connection with Carl Reinecke’s *Trio* that ends next Tuesday’s program.

“I thought that it would be good to conclude a Chamber Music Society performance with a piece of chamber music, and Cynthia DeAlmeida and I recorded the Reinecke six or seven years ago. She’s a powerhouse of an oboist in the rich Philadelphia Orchestra tradition, and she and I have worked together for 30 years.”

That kind of relationship is what has kept William Caballero in Pittsburgh for three decades, even when the Los Angeles Philharmonic came calling. “We negotiated three times,” he said, “but like in Cleveland, the quality of life in Pittsburgh is very good, especially for raising a family, and what happens here at Heinz Hall with Manfred Honeck is quite remarkable. You can’t trade time, and a lot of us have been together for 20 or 30 years. We understand each others’ playing, and you just know where to go.”

Born in New Mexico and raised in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Caballero had gained extensive orchestral experience before joining the Pittsburgh Symphony in 1989, having held principal horn positions with the Houston Symphony, Houston Grand Opera, and Hartford Symphony. He has played in various capacities with the Montréal Symphony and Opera, the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops, and has appeared as guest principal with the orchestras of Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Dallas, and St. Louis.

Caballero is looking forward to renewing relationships in Cleveland both through his recital on Tuesday and through upcoming ChamberFest Cleveland events. He played on Franklin and Diana Cohen's series — which he much admires — in 2015 and will return for three concerts in June. And like most orchestral hornists, he has enormous respect for his colleagues in The Cleveland Orchestra. He rattled off a list of current and former hornists he keeps in touch with, but said he has yet to meet Nathaniel Silberschlag, the recently-appointed principal. “All I know is that I'm old enough to be his dad!”

Tickets for Caballero's April 30 concert are available [online](#). Daniel Hathaway will give a pre-concert lecture at 6:30 pm.

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