

## Seraph Brass visits Rocky River with their newest member

by Stephanie Manning



Seraph Brass welcomed Layan Atieh as their newest core member two months ago — but it may as well have been a lifetime. “I feel like I’ve known them forever,” Atieh said about her new colleagues in a recent interview. “We spend so much time together, I feel like I know everything about them.”

2024 has been quite the busy year for the French horn player, who graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Music shortly before winning her audition to be part of the all-female brass quintet. She also recently moved to Chicago to take up a position with the Civic Orchestra there.

But Atieh can’t stay away from Northeast Ohio for too long — and on Monday, November 11 at 7:30 pm, she’ll perform with Seraph Brass for the Rocky River Chamber Music Society. This free concert will take place at West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church. More information and the livestream link are available [here](#).

This actually won’t be Atieh’s first time back in the area since relocating. When we spoke, she was in between guest performances with The Cleveland Orchestra for their concerts with Tan Dun. “I’m so happy to be back here,” she said. “I really love it.” Atieh is a frequent face in the Orchestra’s horn section, and she’s eager to point out how deep her Cleveland connections go.

“When I was at CIM, I studied with the current principal and the former principal horn,” she said, referring to Nathaniel Silberschlag and Richard King. Plus, King studied with Myron Bloom, the Cleveland principal until 1977.

To top it all off, Atieh’s undergrad professor — Robert Rearden at the Peabody Institute — studied with Richard Solis, Bloom’s successor. “So I’ve had four generations of Cleveland horn playing tradition in my life,” she said. “I just think that’s fun.”

For Seraph's program in Rocky River, the group will present a program of both commissioned works and quintet standards. "We have some super classical pieces" — like an arrangement of Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* — "and we have pieces we've premiered, and everything in between," Atieh said. Her personal favorite is Jeff Scott's *Showcase*. "It has R&B and jazz, and it's incredible."

Scott's piece will appear on Seraph's upcoming album, as will Kevin McKee's *Vuelta del Fuego*. Other pieces on the program come from Seraph's 2018 album *Asteria*, like Rene Orth's *Leagured in Fire, Lagooned in Gold* and Anthony DiLorenzo's *Go*. And individual players are also featured, like trumpeter Raquel Samayoa during Grigoraș Dinicu's *Hora Staccato* (arranged by Tim Olt).

"We feature a lot of underrepresented composers — a lot of women, a lot of minorities — and I think it's a pretty fun program," Atieh said. She added that the ordering of the program is also very intentional.

While many orchestras reserve their contemporary pieces for the first half, "Seraph is very much the opposite," she said. "The bulk of our program and the main feature is the new stuff, which I think is cool."

The quintet plays about half the program from memory, which helps free them up for more movement and eye contact. "I think it sounds better when it's memorized, because we open our ears a little more," Atieh said. "I think the audience enjoys it."

This level of memorization is new to her, as is all the traveling involved in Seraph's busy touring schedule. Since September, the group has appeared throughout the eastern half of the U.S., plus an "amazing" excursion to Peru. Thankfully, the transition has been made easier thanks to her fellow players. "It's very peaceful, with very good dynamics," she said. "We all have different strengths and weaknesses, and we balance each other out pretty well."

Her time with the group has just begun, but she has plenty of goals for the future. "I really love the mission of the group," she said. "Every time we play, especially for kids, we get so much feedback about how excited they are to see people that look like them. And I want to spread that out more."

She's also been fielding questions from people about what it's like to be in a chamber group and how they can start their own. "I think that's lacking in music school education," she said. "So I would love to do more programs where we give presentations about entrepreneurship and the music business."

Atieh is also passionate about teaching, whether that's via Seraph Brass' residencies or her own opportunities in Cleveland and Chicago. When talking to younger players, she emphasizes the instrument's flexibility.

“What I try to advertise about the horn is that it's an instrument that can do everything. You can play high and low, and melody and background — you can play in a woodwind quintet, or a brass quintet, or an orchestra. It's like the jack-of-all-trades instrument. I think that's the best part about it.”

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