

No Exit welcomes Meridian Arts Ensemble back to Cleveland for three concerts

by Mike Telin



For over three decades the Meridian Arts Ensemble has been entralling audiences with their virtuosic performances of envelope pushing repertoire. This week the Meridian — Jon Nelson and Matthew Onstad (trumpets), Daniel Grabois (horn), Faustino Díaz Mendez (trombone), and Tom Curry (tuba) — will return to Cleveland courtesy of No Exit.

Performances are on Thursday, November 7 at Trinity Cathedral, Friday, November 8 at The Bop Stop, and Saturday, November 9 at Baldwin Wallace University’s Kulas Music Hall. The program will include Daniel Grabois’ *Drift* (2021), Moshe Shulman’s *Subito* (2009), George Lewis’s *Tightrope* (2023), Franz Joseph Haydn’s *Feldpartie* (1780), and David Sanford’s *Credo* (2021). All performances begin at 7:00 pm and are free.

Prior to a November of 2022 appearance by Jon Nelson’s Genkin Philharmonic, he told *Clevelandclassical.com* what led him to help found the Meridian Arts Ensemble in 1987.

“I was trained as a classical trumpet player, but I grew up listening to rock, jazz, and funk. But when you’re a trumpet player, you don’t study rock and funk, so I went to classical music,” he said. “As a trumpet player, there’s one portal to pass through and that’s orchestral playing.”

Nelson said that while he liked playing classical music and enjoyed hearing it, one thing he could not stand was counting rests. “It was the most horrible thing for me. I also feel like as brass players, counting rests is a waste of human capital.”

After experiencing a “crisis of conscience,” Nelson dropped out of school and began to “seriously think” about what kind of musical career he would have. “There were a bunch of us at school who felt that way, and that’s when we put the Meridians together,” he

said. Forming the group was a “rebellious act,” he added, but they were determined to make a living at it

“We were a ragtag bunch — there was a point when we had long hair, some of us had earrings, and we wore whatever we wanted. But we performed pieces we had commissioned from Milton Babbitt, and we played Xenakis’s *Khal Perr*. We were making a statement about what brass music could be. It doesn’t have to sound nice all the time. It’s okay to be a little bit messy. Life is messy, the world is messy, and we wanted to perform music that reflected that.”

Although forming the Meridian may have been an act of rebellion, Jon Nelson has gone on to have a long and fruitful musical career which includes teaching at the University of Buffalo since 1998. “They haven’t asked me to leave yet,” he said. “Being at a research university, I get to be in contact with students who are pursuing all kinds of academic majors. And that’s very interesting to me, especially working with engineers who are also very serious about their music. So the Buffalo job has been good to me and I really enjoy the students. It also affords me time and space to put together projects like the Genkin.”

Jon Nelson answers three questions from No Exit’s Laura King [here](#).

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