

## Next Tuesday Musical concert feature Boston Brass & Imani Winds (Feb. 10)

By Mike Telin



Since 1997, the Imani Winds have been at the forefront of expanding the wind quintet repertoire through their commissioning projects, adventurous programming, and unique collaborations, which have attracted audiences of all ages and backgrounds.



Since 1986, Boston Brass have been delighting audiences with one-of-a-kind musical experiences that feature imaginative classical arrangements, jazz standards, and the best of original brass repertoire.

On Tuesday, February 10 at 7:30 pm these two venerable ensembles will join forces at Akron's E.J. Thomas Hall. Presented by Tuesday Musical, their program will include original works and arrangements of pieces by Dmitri Shostakovich, Paul Hindemith, Stevie Wonder, Astor Piazzolla, and Lalo Schiffrin as well as a commissioned piece by trumpet legend Arturo Sandoval. Tickets are available [online](#).

How did Boston Brass — José Sibaja and Jeff Conner (trumpets), Chris Castellanos (horn), Domingo Pagliuca (trombone), and William Russell (Tuba) — and Imani Winds — Brandon Patrick George (flute), Mekhi Gladden (oboe), Mark Dover (clarinet), Kevin Newton (horn), and Monica Ellis (bassoon) — come together?



“This is our second collaboration,” Jeff Conner said during a telephone conversation. “About a dozen years ago we toured Miles Davis and Gil Evans’ *Sketches of Spain* and the Gershwins’ *Porgy and Bess* suites with percussion. We had a great time and have been looking for something else ever since. We thought it would be great to have a piece written for the two groups. Our lead trumpet player José is

good friends with Arturo, so we asked him, and he agreed to do it. *Matelas y Maderas* is just a wonderful piece of music and we really enjoy playing it and sharing it with the audience — it means a lot to us.”

Conner noted that the program includes works for each of the groups as well as newly arranged pieces for the combined ensembles. “There’s the “March” from Hindemith’s *Symphonic Metamorphosis*. There’s “Maria” from *West Side Story* and “Yo Soy María” from Astor Piazzolla’s opera *María de Buenos Aires*, so there’s a little Maria set which is cool. And we have Ernesto Lecuona’s *Malagueña* to end the program.”

Conner said that from their first meeting the personalities and musical sensibilities of the two groups immediately clicked. “At the time we both had the same management and they introduced us to each other. But we knew of them and they knew of us, and we both kind of have the same philosophy and run our groups very similar ways, so we had an instant connection. Our first meeting was at Rutgers University 13 or 14 years ago and we read through those Gil Evans charts. The experience was really special.”

Although the personnel of each ensemble has evolved since that meeting, their passion for making music together still exists. “Monica is the only original member of Imani, and myself and José are the original members of Boston Brass. Monica and I talk about the two groups’ legacy a lot. We’ve been going strong for 40 years, and with the Imani Winds Foundation they’re able to do a lot of educational programs and commissions, so their footprint is everywhere.”

Conner said that when he arrived at Boston University, forming a brass quintet was already on his mind. “It was funny because in high school I had the opportunity to go to Tanglewood for four weeks to be part of the Empire Brass Symposium. In the early to mid-’80s the Empire Brass were the best chamber music group in the world — not just the best brass quintet. And as a high school student I got to see what they did, the music they played, and how they would leave for the weekend to play concerts. And seeing everything, I was like, ‘I’m going to do that.’ I hadn’t even spent a day in college, and I didn’t know how I was going to do that, but I was going to figure it out.”

Although it took time and a lot of hard work before the ensemble began to take off, Conner said that eventually it became a small business. “What I think is nice about our group is that we’re an equal partnership. And we have a good time.”

Winding down our conversation I asked Conner if there was anything that people should know before coming to the concert?

“The most important thing is how much we appreciate people coming out to hear live music. Especially now I think it’s really important for communities to come together and

listen to something that's joyous. Sometimes people hear the words chamber music and they think of something that's very stuffy, and that's not either of our groups at all. We introduce the pieces so listeners can get to know the personalities of the music, and the personalities of the members as well, which I think is really nice. We're having a good time on stage and we want the audience to enjoy it as much as we are."

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