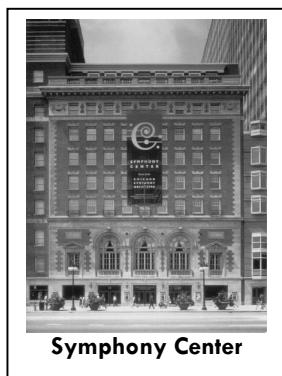


## MIDWEST SIDE STORIES #4

### The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Brass in Concert by Hamish Arthur

---

Thursday December 17, 2009:



At last the day had arrived. After months of anticipation I was finally going to experience the legendary Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) Brass Section live in concert as part of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic. This was undoubtedly the highlight of my KBB Music funded trip to Chicago and although I spent the morning at the Clinic attending a number of informative seminars it was hard staying focused as my mind was elsewhere. For years I had been listening to recordings of the CSO and in particular their phenomenal brass section featuring legendary performers and teachers such as Bud Herseth (Principal Trumpet 1948 - 2001), Dale Clevenger (Principal Horn since 1966), Jay Friedman (Principal Trombone since 1964), Charles Vernon (Bass Trombone since 1986) and Arnold Jacobs (Tuba from 1944 – 1988) and now, at last, I was going to hear them live at Symphony Center – the home of the CSO (see left).

After consulting my map of Chicago and employing all of my School Certificate Geography skills I decided that Symphony Centre was easily within walking distance from the Midwest Clinic. An hour later I discovered that if I kept up my current rate of progress I would be just in time for the Independence Day Concert and in the immortal words of the Doodlebops it was time to “get on the bus”. (NB: a word of warning – please ensure you have the correct change when you get on a bus in Chicago or the driver will stare at you with a look of contempt that is usually reserved for people who recite entire Monty Python skits).

Upon arrival at Symphony Center I spent some time wandering the corridors of this hallowed institution and it was clear that this was an organization that is understandably proud of the CSO heritage and the many performers and conductors who have helped to create and maintain this legacy. This was particularly noticeable in the gift shop where you could purchase a wide variety of books, recordings, DVDs, teaching materials devoted to the CSO as well as a healthy variety of the universally loathed “music gifts” such as ties with keyboards on them, socks with musical staves running round the cuff, treble clef magnets, and even Bach and Mozart action figures (“Wow Dad I was hoping for a G.I. Joe but this even better...Surrender Wolfgang Amadeus or I will unleash my army of Baroque warriors! You and your children will never defeat me Johann Sebastian!”).



The concert was due to start at 3pm and as I had arrived early I decided to go and sit in the theatre and read my programme in order to find out more information about the works that were going to be performed. After taking my seat I noticed that I was the only one in the entire theatre and as it was still 45 minutes until show time I figured it would probably be ok to take a photo of the stage as a memento of the occasion. As I raised the camera I noticed a sudden chill in the air and the sound of rushing wind through the aisles. Thinking nothing of it, I calmly adjusted the viewfinder and took a shot of the magnificent stage. I struggle to recall exactly what took place in the next few seconds. In fact, all I can remember is the “click” of the camera followed by a sudden blur of red vests, gold badges and two screaming voices...

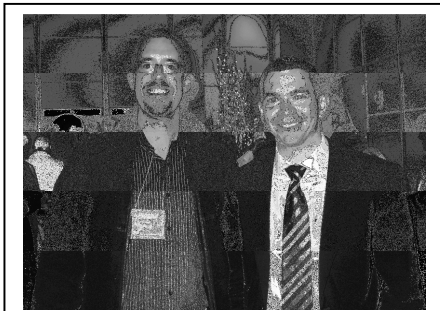
Blur # 1: NO PHOTOS!!!

Blur # 2: THAT'S THE LAST ONE SIR!!!

After climbing back up from under my seat and allowing my heart rate to return to a more manageable 200bpm I was able to deduce that the screaming voices and red vests belonged to a couple of ninja-like ushers who were enforcing the Center's strict photo policy. Regaining my composure I apologized for my indiscretion and blamed my misdemeanor on a simple case of cultural confusion – “I'm very sorry but at classical concerts in New Zealand we are encouraged to take photos whenever we like, yell out requests if we don't like the repertoire, go up on stage and hi-5 the conductors and soloists if we think they've done well – why, we're even allowed to clap between movements”. The ushers looked unconvinced (particularly about the clapping between movements) and

urged me to put my camera away until I had left the theatre which I immediately did along with all of my other electronic devices. With the stern glare of the rest of the ninja-usher army upon me I decided it would be wise to revert to my primary school training and to sit tall with my arms crossed while facing the front in order to avoid any further confrontations.

At last it was concert time and apart from a technical delay due to a malfunctioning music stand light the performances were faultless (I am sure the Ninja Ushers attributed the faulty light to my forbidden photo). I had never heard brass playing of this caliber before – flawless technique, stunning musicianship, impeccable intonation, and a depth and warmth of tone that had to be heard to be believed. Highlights from the programme included original brass works such as *Arbos* by Arvo Pärt, *Mutations from Bach* by Samuel Barber and *Concerto for Brass* by Paul Terracini as well as wonderful arrangements of orchestral classics such as Eric Crees' magnificent setting of Aaron Copland's *El salón México*. After several standing ovations the players returned to the stage to perform an encore of Richard Strauss' *Thus Spake Zarathustra* which happily erased from my memory the previous performance I had endured of this work by the New Zealand Friendly Orchestra – a performance so painful it should have come with a health warning (check out some past performances of the NZFO on YouTube - especially if you think your ensemble sounds bad).



Hamish Arthur and Chris Martin

Following the concert there was an opportunity to mix and mingle with the players in the stairwell foyer of the theatre. At first I was apprehensive about attending this event as I feared I would be a little awestruck and embarrass myself by saying something stupid. My fears were put to rest, however, by the relaxed and humble nature of all of the performers who happily chatted to one and all, posed for photos and signed autographs for their many fans. It was particularly pleasing to chat with CSO Principal Trumpet Christopher Martin who had given an inspiring seminar at the Midwest Clinic the previous day. He is a gifted and fearless musician who is young, amicable, highly respected by his peers and handsome – but, as you can see from the attached photo (left) I am clearly taller than him – in your face Martin!

After a quick chat with Principal Trombone Jay Friedman (I told him he played “really well” – I’m sure it meant a lot to him) it was time to leave Symphony Centre and return to the Midwest Clinic for the evening concerts. As I walked through the halls of Symphony Center for the final time I felt truly blessed to have been given the opportunity to attend such an amazing concert but at the same time I couldn’t shake the feeling that I was being watched in the shadows by a pair of ever-vigilant ninja-ushers determined to preserve the sacred art of concert etiquette. With ushers this good it is no wonder that the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is considered by many to be the best orchestra in the world.



Jay Friedman and Hamish Arthur

***Hamish's trip to the 2009 Midwest Clinic would not have been possible without financial assistance from Edgewater College, Epsom Girls Grammar, Pakuranga College, Rangitoto College, Sancta Maria College and the George & Glenise Arthur retirement fund – cheers!***

***Special thanks also to Simon Hocking from House of Travel who organized all of the travel and accommodation.***