

Notes on the FW Symphony at Carnegie

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By ROBERT PHILPOT

NEW YORK — It's tough to take a Carnegie Hall concert for granted, especially on your first visit as an audience member. The sense of history and prestige of the place wash over you as you sit in the hall, which is so surprisingly bright and fresh that it's easy to forget it's more than 100 years old.

Among the Tarrant County notables who attended the Fort Worth Symphony's Carnegie debut Saturday night was Sandra Brown, the mega-selling Arlington-based mystery author. Brown is about to begin a book tour that will take her to Japan, but she made sure it started after the symphony's concert.

"I'm a huge fan of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra," she said, taking time to chat in sub-30-degree weather. "They're really like ambassadors for the United States of Texas." Brown was one of more than 2,100 people who attended the concert, a crowd that didn't leave many visible empty seats. Sunday's concert, a performance of Prokofiev's Peter and the Wolf with narration in English by actor John Lithgow and in Spanish by the symphony's music director, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, will be even more packed: It's sold out. **The fan club**

In the hours before Saturday's debut, there was time to chat with some members of the friendly Cowtown contingent at the sleek, super-modern Le Parker Meridien hotel, where the musicians and many of their fans were staying.

Lighting up the lobby on Saturday morning were the exuberant Maryann Schoening, Kathleen Stewart and Jean Brown, who had been making the most of New York City in the couple of days before the concert.

They took in the Broadway hit Curtains and spent Friday night at the New York City Ballet. To fortify themselves for all the high culture, they grabbed a street-vendor hot dog as soon as they hit town.

Why did they make the trip? If she hadn't come, Brown said, "I was afraid I'd miss something."

Thought for food

Concertmaster Michael Shih, who lived in New York from 1982 to 2001 (and spent his first year in Fort Worth commuting back and forth to New York), arrived early for a couple of reasons. One was food.

"I lived in New York for 19 years, and I missed my Chinese food," he says. "I've just been enjoying the various restaurants that I used to go to." Shih found that several on his list were closed, but he made a pilgrimage to Chinatown for steamed pork buns at Joe's Shanghai.

But it wasn't all about food. The Stradivarius Shih plays is maintained by a man in New York.

"I got here a couple of days early, and that gave me an opportunity to take it to the shop and have it maintained," he says. Shih also got his violin bow re-haired.

Shih ended a brief interview with questions about where we journalists were going to eat dinner, and after hearing our list of ethnic restaurants near Carnegie Hall, he informed us that they were all very good, then signed off with "Bon appetit."

It's all in the mind

This wasn't Harriet Woldt's first performance at Carnegie Hall. The cellist, who has been with the Fort Worth Symphony for more than 50 years, played here as part of the Texas Little Symphony in 1981.

Like most of the players, Woldt, who arrived Friday, hadn't been with her instrument since Wednesday, when the group began the process of loading them onto a truck to ship to New York. But she's been able to practice nevertheless.

"I practice mentally," she says. "On the plane."

Mentally?

Woldt demonstrates with her left hand mostly still and her right one moving in a bowing motion. Even if you didn't already know what instrument she played, you'd know immediately that she was a cellist.

No separation anxiety

This is assistant principal bassist Paul Unger's first Carnegie Hall concert, but like other musicians we talked to, he was trying to keep it in perspective.

"You know, on the one hand, it's just another concert," he says. "But mentally, I know I need to tell myself that ... I'm a professional, I've played hundreds of concerts, and so I need to remember this is just another concert and I need to do what I've been trained to do.

"But you also know that this is kind of a milestone," he added, "something special and unique in your life."

Saying hi to folks back home

French horn player Alton Adkins, a symphony member for 14 years, was also making his Carnegie Hall debut. A couple of hours before Saturday's rehearsal, he acknowledged some nervousness -- but no more than for any other performance. But there was a recent moment when the significance of the concert really hit him.

"I guess it really sunk in when I was dropping off some snacks for my kindergartner's class," says Adkins, the father of 6- and 10-year-old boys. "The kindergarten teacher said, 'Ohhh, I saw that you guys are going to Carnegie. I'm so excited, this is so great.' That's when it really made me well up with a sense of pride. You know, we're representing our city. I'm so honored to represent Fort Worth in this way."

Adkins arrived Friday evening, which gave him, his wife and some friends time to pay a visit to Times Square, about 10 blocks south of the hotel, and send a greeting to his sons, who were staying with their grandparents back home.

"It was great to go down to Times Square and look at the [EarthCam](#) and wave to our kids on the computer, so they got to see us," he says. "We were standing in front of T.G.I. Fridays, looking at this camera, and there was a little delay saying, 'Oh, this is great! We can see you!'"

Adkins says his boys are budding musicians, playing trumpet and piano.

"There's lots of sound in our house," he says with a laugh. "With two boys, even when there are not instruments, it's noisy."



Ed Jones, tuba player with the Fort Worth Symphony, packs his instrument for the orchestra's upcoming trip to Carnegie Hall on Tuesday.