

Backstage

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Spring 2008

Thunder and Yearning

An Interview with Percussionist Lisa Pegher

Lisa Pegher will play a plethora of instruments when she appears with the Lansing Symphony in a MasterWorks concert on Friday, March 28 at 8 p.m. in the Wharton Center. The program is titled "Thunder and Yearning" and will feature *The Trojans: Royal Hunt and Storm*, by Berlioz; *Joseph Schwantner's Percussion Concerto*; and *Symphony No. 3*, by Brahms. Tickets start at \$10. Call the Symphony office, 517-487-5001, or order online at www.LansingSymphony.org.

This interview was conducted, condensed and edited by LSO Director of Communications **Cindy Hunter Morgan**.

When you perform with the Lansing Symphony in March you will have a lot of instruments with you. A mix of pitched and un pitched?

Yes.

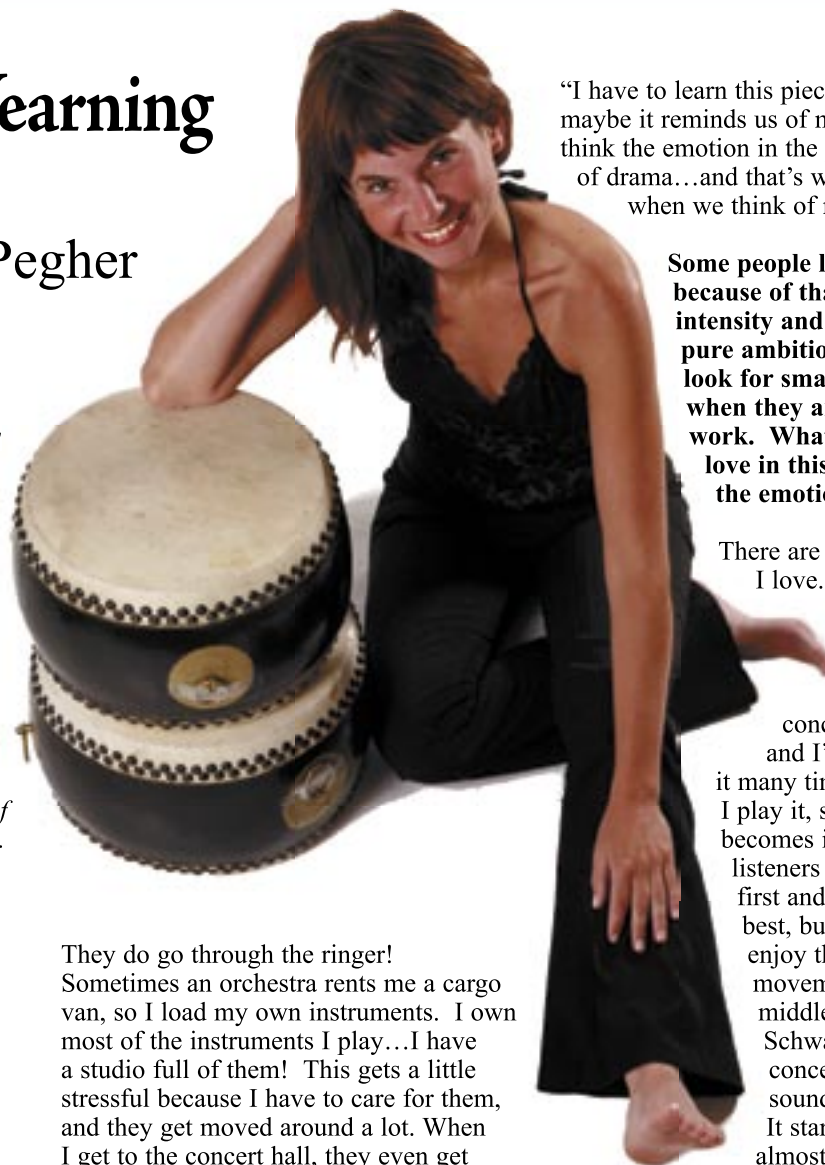
How many of them can you actually tune?

I can tune most of my drums...the tom toms, the bass drum, the bongos. Others don't have a definite pitch, or if they do, they are pretuned. The almglocken have a really specific sound, and they come pretuned.

What are you bringing and what is the orchestra supplying?

Well, whenever I perform with an orchestra, I give them a list of the instruments I need and I see what they can provide. Normally, I ask that they supply the things I can't carry on a plane, such as the biggest instrument you'll see on stage -- a five-octave marimba.

Do your instruments generally require some repair after a road trip?



They do go through the ringer! Sometimes an orchestra rents me a cargo van, so I load my own instruments. I own most of the instruments I play...I have a studio full of them! This gets a little stressful because I have to care for them, and they get moved around a lot. When I get to the concert hall, they even get moved by people I don't know. So they get damaged sometimes, but I keep an eye on them.

You'll be playing Schwantner's Percussion Concerto, which has some really dramatic passages. It reminds me of a movie score. Do you hear that in this piece as well?

Yes...this is a very important piece in the percussion repertoire. It was premiered in 1995...I was still in high school in 1995! And until it was premiered (by the New York Philharmonic), people hadn't really taken solo percussion seriously. The first time I heard it, I was living at home with my parents. I had the score, I was sitting in the living room listening to the recording, and there was just something about the piece that struck me. I thought,

"I have to learn this piece!" And yes, maybe it reminds us of movie music. I think the emotion in the piece reminds us of drama...and that's what we think of when we think of movies.

Some people love a work because of that drama...that intensity and that sense of pure ambition. Some people look for smaller moments when they are listening to a work. What is it that you love in this concerto? Is it the emotion?

There are a couple of things I love. This piece has grown with me as a person. It was the first percussion concerto I learned, and I've performed it many times. Each time I play it, something new becomes important. Most listeners probably like the first and third movements best, but I particularly enjoy the second movement. There is this middle section where Schwantner writes for concert bass drum. It sounds like heart beats. It starts off really softly, almost inaudibly, and then the bass drum grows

and grows, and the rhythms get faster and louder, and eventually it turns into a roll and the orchestra is triple fortissimo, and I'm playing as loud as I can. But it has come from nothing. And it ends with this huge, powerful sound. It's a very emotional place in the score.

You have performed with many fine orchestras, but your life as a musician is pretty diverse. Tell us about some of your other work.

I do have an interesting life! I mostly work from home. I have a percussion studio, which I basically sleep in! I wake up every day and look at my instruments, and sometimes it's a bit daunting. But I love the fact that I can get up in the morning and go out and learn music. I

practice six-to-eight hours each day, and when I'm in my studio I'm very close to what I do. That's a great feeling. Besides being a soloist, I also teach a little bit, I'm a timpanist in an orchestra down here (Louisiana), and I perform in the percussion section with the Baton Rouge Symphony...when I'm in town!

I've had a chance to visit your website (www.lisapegher.com) and read your journal posted there. It sounds like you experienced some hard times last year, but are emerging on the other side of that pain. Has music been, as Robert Frost said of poetry, "a momentary stay against confusion" for you?

I did go through the most difficult year of my life last year, and music helped me get through it. I didn't grow up in a family of musicians: this endeavor found me, and I think it saved me from a lot of hardships as a child. Sometimes music is a way of getting something out of our bodies that we need to get rid of. There were evenings when I was behind my marimba writing songs and crying. It was a healing process. Eventually, I started to get on top of things again. When I performed a concert again, I felt like I was going to be o.k. And it was music! It's something that has saved me several times in my life.

And yet, in the end, art – music – must do more than simply console or distract. What do you expect of art, of music? What do you demand of it?

That's very true. I look at music as a lifetime challenge, and as an outlet. I think music is something that can always be better. It's a learning experience. I'm always striving to make the music as good as it can be. I don't think I've ever gotten to a point where I've said, "Oh that's it! That's the best that can be!"

One final question: Are you an "art for the sake of life," or "life for the sake of art" sort of musician?

That's a tough one! I'd have to go with "art for life." Just being around people in the arts is good. We're trying to do something that makes the world a better place. I don't think art should take over your life, but it would be a very dull world without music.

Guilty Pleasures

A Conversation with Guest Conductor Stuart Chafetz

Stuart Chafetz will lead the Lansing Symphony in the final Pops Concert of the season, "Piano Pops," on Friday, April 11 at 8 p.m. in Wharton Center's Great Hall. The LSO Pops Series is sponsored by **Auto-Owners**. Tickets start at \$10 for adults, \$7 for students.

This interview was conducted, condensed and edited by LSO Director of Communications **Cindy Hunter Morgan**.

You are Resident Conductor of the Milwaukee Symphony and Music Director of the Maui Pops. You have appeared with orchestras throughout the country, and this April you will conduct the Lansing Symphony. What is your approach with a new orchestra in that first rehearsal together?

The best thing is just to let the orchestra play and get to know each other. Lansing has such a great orchestra, so I'm sure it will be very easy to put things together. Having a soloist is always another factor in the mix of things. I'm looking forward to working with Rich Ridenour. Generally, I like to let the orchestra do their thing, and I just try to be the conduit for great music.

A concert is a real communal gesture. Do you feel that sense of community as intensely when you are a guest conductor?

Yes, surprisingly so. Most orchestras have such a sense of community that you get swept up in it. I already know a few people – your Music Director Timothy Muffitt, Principal Flute Rick Sherman, and Principal Oboe Jan Eberle...there

is a Chautauqua connection there. And I've known David Gross (Executive Director) a long time. So I already feel a part of the community.

There is an interesting range of music programmed for this Pops concert – Billy Joel and Beethoven are both represented on the program. What are you excited about conducting?

All of them! Pops can mean so many things... it can be Billy Joel or Led Zeppelin or Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with slides and art work. I'm really excited about doing *Rhapsody in Blue* with Rich Ridenour...that will be great. And I'm excited about performing some of Leroy Anderson's music. There is a sampling of many musical styles in this concert. There really is something for everyone!

A recent article in *The New York Times* featured a list of "secret musical passions" compiled by music critics. They listed works that might be called "trivial," but which bring them real delight or satisfaction. One of the critics listed several Leroy Anderson pieces, including *Fiddle Faddle* and *Syncopated Clock*, which we will play in April. Do you think of this music as a guilty pleasure?

Well, yes...Leroy Anderson's work makes you feel good. It's like coming home to a fire in the fireplace and a cup of hot chocolate...it's feel-good stuff. I would say that "guilty pleasure" would definitely be a way to describe the Leroy Anderson experience.

But why the guilt?

I don't know...is that what the article said – "guilty pleasure?"

No, I think that was my interpretation of it.

Oh, O.K. Then...no guilt!

O.K...Good. Our listeners shouldn't feel any either.

What is essential to your life as a musician?

The most important thing for me is that classical music gets played so that families can enjoy it together. We get isolated with our palm pilots, Game Boys, and lap tops, and bringing families together to share great music is a real passion of mine.

Sometimes people talk about a work that changed their life. Sometimes we walk out of the concert hall feeling changed, even if that change is only in awareness, not inclination. Have you felt significantly altered by any particular work?

I think that there have been more experiences that changed me. I'm a timpanist, and I'll always remember the time I got to play Schumann's Symphony No. 2. with Leonard Bernstein. That changed my life. Every time I hear that slow movement I think of that experience. Music brings us back to these important moments. Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony was the first thing that really grabbed me when I was playing in a youth orchestra. It got me into classical music. I remember



Guest Conductor Stuart Chafetz

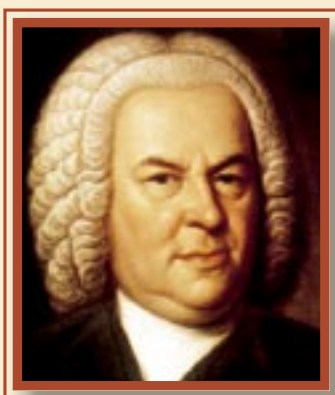
going to the University of Cincinnati, and on my first day I said to someone, "Oh, I love Tchaikovsky's fourth!" And some snotty clarinetist said, "Oh that's so trite!" I thought that was so funny...we were both only about 17 or 18!

You have a home in Honolulu and a home in Chautauqua. Is it hard to live among great populations of people who are on vacation?

That's a very good question. It is interesting when the place you live depends so much on tourism. Where we live in Hawaii, it's more of a neighborhood than Waikiki, where all the tourists are. We still struggle with the tourist mentality. When people visit they would rather go whale watching or drink Mai Tais than come hear Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra. And it is especially hard when people are visiting from places that have great orchestras... LA or Chicago. But there is a real sense of community in Honolulu, and in the neighboring islands. It's that community that you really have to focus on.



Lansing Symphony Orchestra SPECIAL EVENT



Bach's Saint John Passion

St. Mary Cathedral
219 Seymour Avenue • Lansing
David Rayl Conductor



Capitol National Bank, an Affiliate of Capitol Bancorp

Sunday, March 16, 2008, 7 p.m.

This Palm Sunday, experience one of Bach's most powerful oratorios in the beautiful environment of St. Mary Cathedral. The MSU Chorale & Choral Union join a 22-piece Lansing Symphony Orchestra for this special performance.

Tickets: \$15 Adults \$7 Students

Call the LSO Office: 517-487-5001
Order tickets online at www.LansingSymphony.org

Piano Man

Five Questions for Rich Ridenour

Guest artist **Rich Ridenour** will perform with the Lansing Symphony on Friday, April 11 at 8 p.m. in a "Piano Pops" concert sponsored by **Auto-Owners**.

This interview was conducted, condensed and edited by LSO Director of Communications **Cindy Hunter Morgan**.

One of the works listeners will hear in the April Piano Pops program is *Rhapsody in Blue*. You played this with the DSO on two hours notice. How did that transpire?

Well, that's a good story! I did that a couple of years ago on Valentine's Day. I substituted for Peter Nero. The DSO had called the night before at about 8 p.m. and my son Ross had taken the call but didn't give me the message. Fortunately, they called again in the morning and said, "Hey, did you get this message?" No, I hadn't gotten the message! But it all worked out and I put on my suit and zoomed over there and played the concert, and it went beautifully. Later, I scolded my son and I said, "See, this is why it's really important to take messages!" And Ross said, "Well Dad, if I had remembered to give you the message, you just would have been awake all night worrying about the concert! It worked out better this way!"

Christian Wiman, the editor of *Poetry* magazine, shared an interesting story about poet Seamus Heaney. Apparently, Heaney said that if a person has a single poem in his head, one that he returns to and through which, even in small ways, he understands his life better, this constitutes a devotion to the art. When it comes to orchestral music, that "one work" is often *Rhapsody in Blue*. What is it about this piece that resonates with people?

It's really interesting to think about that. There was a lot of debate about this work after it was premiered...a lot of discussion about whether it was good or not. Gershwin had committed to writing *Rhapsody*, and then he forgot about it until he saw a newspaper ad announcing the work's premiere...which gave him about a month to complete it! He realized he had to finish the piece, and it turned out to be a real sensation. I think it has connected with so many people because there are elements of different types of music in it...classical, of course, but also jazz and blues.

You are a native of Grand Rapids, you went to the University of Michigan (and later the Juilliard School of



Guest Artist Rich Ridenour

Music), and you now live in Portage. You have many Michigan connections, yet this is your first performance with the Lansing Symphony. What are you looking forward to?

Meeting new friends and sharing new music with a new audience. One of the things I love to do at a Piano Pops concert – and I'll do it at the Wharton Center in April – is a "Top Ten" list in the second half. I'll walk around at intermission and ask listeners

what they want to hear, and I'll play some of those requests in the second half of the concert. It's really fun, and it helps me get to know the audience and helps get the audience involved.

You once accompanied "Bob" on Sesame Street, and you also served as Education Director for the Gilmore Keyboard Festival. What was your own experience with and exposure to music and music education as a youth in Grand Rapids?

I grew up taking private piano lessons. Back then, kids went to St. Cecilia Music Society to have opportunities to experience music together, with other young people. They'd have different musicians come talk to us and meet with us. Theo Alcantara, former music director of the Grand Rapids Symphony, came one time. It was really a good place to meet other young people and realize, "Oh, you play the piano too! Oh, you play the clarinet!" There was also the Youth Concerto Competition, sponsored by the Grand Rapids Symphony, which I won. These were important opportunities.

We live in world where the pursuit of art – music, poetry, painting – is often not recognized as ambition. Your family has really bucked this mentality. You are a concert pianist; your wife, Stacy, is the Executive Director of the Kalamazoo Symphony; your son Brandon, a trumpet player, is a Juilliard grad and a member of Canadian Brass; and your son Ross is a percussionist. Is this the life you always imagined?

No, it's really not the life I imagined! I never thought I'd be a professional concert pianist, but it has turned out to be a lot of fun! As far as our family...Stacy and I never wanted to pressure our kids to become professional musicians, we just wanted to make sure that music was a part of their lives. But things really took off for Brandon, and we have had a lot of fun playing together as a family.

Spring Concerts at the LSO

Bach's Saint John Passion (See ad, page 2): **Sunday, March 16, 7 p.m.** St. Mary Cathedral. \$15 adults, \$7 students.

Thunder and Yearning (See interview, page 1): **Friday, March 28, 8 p.m.** Wharton Center. \$10 - \$43.

Piano Pops (See interviews, pages 2 & 3): **Friday, April 11, 8 p.m.** Wharton Center. \$7 - \$30.

Lansing Symphony Winds: A Chamber Concert on **Sunday, April 27, 3 p.m.** Plymouth Congregational Church. \$15 adults, \$7 students.

Music of the Earth: A MasterWorks Concert on **Saturday, May 17, 8 p.m.** Wharton Center. \$10 - \$43.

Call for Tickets: 517-487-5001 or Order Online: www.LansingSymphony.org

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Suite 100
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“Wish List” Gives You More Ways to Help the Symphony

The LSO could use a few things for the office. If you are able to donate something featured on the list below, please let us know! For more information, or to make arrangements for a donation, please contact Dru Mitchell at the Symphony office, 517-487-5001. Thank you for considering a donation!

- Computers :
- CPUs
- Flat-screen monitors
- Printers
- Easels
- Paper-folding machine
- Paper shredder
- Paper cutter



Commitment from Community Makes LSO Holiday Pops Another Success

Top Left: Dr. Earl Reisdorff (left) composed a work for the Lansing Symphony. His arrangement, “Sanctus Dies,” was premiered at the Holiday Pops concert in December. Reisdorff is a physician at Inham Regional Medical Center. He is pictured here with WLNS News Anchor and LSO Board member Dave Akerly. WLNS TV 6 broadcast the LSO Holiday Pops, allowing thousands of people to hear the orchestra and enjoy some classic holiday music. The LSO Pops Series is sponsored by Auto-Owners. **Right:** Jordan Pence, daughter of LSO Board member John Pence, enjoyed seeing Santa in the lobby of the Wharton Center before the LSO Holiday Pops concert. “Santa” is Tim Tunks, stepfather of LSO Bookkeeper Karen Cutshaw. **Bottom Left:** LSO Executive Director David Gross (left) enjoyed talking with Maestro Society Golden Baton Circle members John and Jenny Bond at a reception before the Holiday Pops concert. The Symphony hosts receptions throughout the season for Maestro Society donors.



Left: “Bloom,” designed by Amy Fossum. **Right:** “Spring Interlude,” created by Naturals Design Studio (located in Central Park Place). Designers JoAnn Steinborn, Tammy Jackard and Jill Schafer collaborated on this project.



Event co-chair Sandy Grettenberger, Tables of Note Executive Committee members Michelle Ballein and Suzanne Rupp, and co-chair Kim Hartman.

Tables of Note 2008

When it comes to entertainment, the Lansing Symphony Orchestra doesn’t stop with great music. On February 8, the Symphony presented “Tables of Note,” a benefit for the LSO that featured an afternoon tea party, an evening cocktail party, a raffle of enticing items, musical entertainment, and the opportunity to view and bid on 20 uniquely decorated tables. WLNS News Anchor and LSO Board member Dave Akerly served as the auctioneer. The event, held at Walnut Hills Country Club, was co-chaired by LSO Board member Kim Hartman and Sandy Grettenberger and was designed to raise money for the Symphony’s youth and education programs.

Backstage

Lansing Symphony Orchestra
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www.LansingSymphony.org

Timothy Muffitt, Music Director & Conductor
Chris Day, Board President
David S. Gross, Executive Director
Cindy Hunter Morgan, Director of Communications

The Lansing Symphony Orchestra is supported by the Michigan Council for Arts & Cultural Affairs, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the City of Lansing.

