

by Mike Telin



In the past few years, many of Northeast Ohio's classical music organizations and players have been busy identifying niches that need to be filled in order to invigorate the classical concert experience for area audiences, as well as to create opportunities for the players. One such organization is the Cleveland Winds, a professional quality

symphonic band that will continue its inaugural season with a performance at Cleveland State University's Waetjen Auditorium on Monday, March 1st at 7:00 PM.

Since his arrival in Northeast Ohio in 2002, Cleveland Winds founder Birch Browning (left) has been busy at CSU where he serves as an Associate Professor of Music Education as well as the school's Graduate Music Program Director. He has also been carefully assessing the role that wind bands play in the area's musical life. Browning tells us what he found; "There are plenty of groups around town, but they are all university groups, like the University Circle Wind Ensemble. There are a couple of university bands at Case, as well as a plethora of youth wind ensembles in the area. There is a really fine wind band at Cleveland State, and there is a really good wind ensemble at Oberlin. The University of Akron has a really fine band program, and Kent has a program that is doing quite well, and then there is Wooster. " Furthering his assessment of the situation, Browning goes on to say; "I also started to pay attention to community bands. University Heights has one as does Shaker, there's one in Wadsworth, and I think Euclid and Pepper Pike both have one, so there really are a lot of opportunities for people to keep playing and listening to wind band music The only thing that was missing from the band life in Cleveland was a professional quality band that is playing that top flight, cutting edge literature."

Browning is no stranger to the role that bands play in the musical life in other parts of the world where it is not uncommon for audiences to fill concert venues to hear the symphonic band literature. "I recently spent three weeks in Russia back in November, and what I was

doing was touring around conducting professional city bands, paid for by the city. We would get together for three or four days of rehearsals, then they rent an auditorium, truck in all of the equipment, and the houses were full."

What finally inspired Browning to form the Cleveland Winds? "First of all, there is so much great wind band literature that doesn't get played enough, and I wanted to have an ensemble and a venue where this music can get played. The wind band literature that has been written in the last fifty years is on a par with the orchestral literature. Many of the same composers who have gotten awards for their orchestral compositions have also written for wind band. Secondly, I had a really interesting experience last spring when I guest conducted he Cleveland Philharmonic. It had been maybe fifteen years since I had had a chance to work with adults who were playing just to play. They weren't getting paid and they weren't getting a credit or some other incentive other than just playing music. I had forgotten just how much fun it was to make music -- just to make music." After this experience, Browning says "I just called around and asked; "If I put this together would you play?" I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised that almost everybody I asked said yes. I think it's going to work out. The players came and they did one concert and they showed up for the second set of rehearsals. Everybody's willing to do one."

The program for the March 1st concert covers the gamut of the literature: Ron Nelson's Passacaglia (Homage on B-A-C-H), Paul Hayden's 'Concerto for alto saxophone and wind ensemble' with John Perrine as soloist, Richard Strauss's 'Serenade in E-flat' and Vincent Persichetti's 'Symphony for Band'. "A lot of times people will try to program everything that was written in the last week, or just the stuff from the early part of the 20th century that maybe they played when they were in band. I think it's nice to mix things up but most importantly to choose pieces that work well together. The Strauss takes us back 130 years, then you have the Hayden and Nelson from the last five and then the Persichetti from the 50's".

Cleveland Winds perform on Monday, March 1 in Waetjen Auditorium at Cleveland State University. Tickets are \$5 at the door, \$2 for students.