Playing Behind the Curtain: Mock Orchestral Audition Leads to Professional Opportunity

Double bassist Mary Reed, a student at the USC Thornton School of Music, wins chance to play with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (LACO) as part of new LACO-USC Thornton Strings Mentorship Program

Los Angeles (September, 30, 2010) – on Tuesday, September 21, 2010, select students at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music played for an esteemed panel of judges in a mock orchestral audition for strings. Training classical musicians for the rigors of the audition process has long been part of the Thornton school’s curriculum, but this audition offered a substantial prize: joining the Los Angeles chamber orchestra for a week of concerts.

An exciting new partnership, the LACO-USC Thornton strings mentorship program offers Thornton students an opportunity to play with LACO. “The new collaboration is part of a drive to enhance the preparedness of strings students in their professional careers,” said midori, chair of the strings program at the Thornton school and the Jascha Heifetz chair in Violin. The mentorship program is unique among conservatories in the U.S., and the value of the experience goes beyond the concerts. “It’s about so much more than the actual performances,” said midori. “It’s about learning what it’s like to be an orchestral musician.”

The winner, double bassist Mary Reed, will be invited to play one subscription week with LACO during the 2010-2011 season. “I have worked really hard to get here and was thrilled about winning the audition. I was competing against violinists, violists, and cellists, and it’s exciting that they chose a double bass player!” said Reed, a first-year Master’s student studying with David Moore, Thornton school faculty member and bassist with the Los Angeles philharmonic.

The runner-up was violinist Stirling Trent, a dma student studying with midori. “I learned a lot from this audition and I will take what I learned to other auditions,” said Trent.

The judges included Margaret Batjer, LACO’s concertmaster & Thornton faculty, Roland
Kato, principal viola of LACO, and Peter Stumpf, principal cello of the Los Angeles Philharmonic & USC Thornton faculty.

The mock audition, organized by Batjer and Midori, gave students practical audition experience and the public a behind-the-scenes look at a process usually kept private. Students, asked to duplicate the audition process in the most realistic setting, performed behind a large curtain. After the audition, the judges offered comments to the participants and the audience. “A conductor doesn’t want to have to tell you what’s already in the music. It’s expected you understand that,” said Stumpf. “Judges for orchestral positions are looking for you to show variations that reflect the composer, the piece, and reflect your own musicianship. Make a statement that is unique and find that one moment where you shine and set yourself apart from the others,” Batjer added.

“The Los Angeles chamber orchestra is delighted to collaborate with the Thornton school on this program. We believe that it will provide talented students with a meaningful experience, helping to bridge the gap between academic training and the world of the active professional orchestral musician,” said LACO executive director Andrea Laguni.

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**About the Thornton School’s Strings Program**

The USC Thornton School of Music has a 125-year tradition of pairing the world’s preeminent strings teachers with the highest caliber of student musicians. The school offers innovative seminars, programs, and subjects of study that are unique among American schools of music. The Thornton school encourages its students to hone their instrumental skills, artistic development, and business acumen in ways that prepare them to be distinctively successful in the classical musical world of the 21st century. Just a few of the Thornton school’s acclaimed former students include Piotr Anderszewski, Erick Friedman, Richard O’Neill, Sharon Robinson, Steven Tenenbom, Glenn Dieterow, Lawrence Lesser, Cynthia Phelps, and Michael Tilson Thomas.