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Musical Musings

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John Holt, the professor of trumpet at the University of North Texas (UNT) and chair of the division of instrumental studies, is also the principal trumpet at The Dallas Opera. Mr. Holt uses the word “magical” many times when he talks about his 40-year career in music. While Mr. Holt says the idea of what makes the trumpet magical is hard to describe, for him, it seems to be about more than the music. It is the places he has travelled, the people he has met, the students he has taught and the memories created by one instrument, which he has mastered.

Mr. Holt, a Frisco resident since 2010, grew up in Texas, on a farm in Hebron, on the land that is now Hebron High School. His parents owned a 200-acre ranch where they had cattle, horses and grew crops. Mr. Holt began playing the trumpet in the sixth grade. His family was musically inclined, but ranching was their livelihood. He says he remembers riding horses in the mornings before school. “My father sang in the glee club at Texas A&M University in the 1930s and my brother played cornet in public school,” he says.

At 18, Mr. Holt was accepted to Eastern Music Festival in Chapel Hill, N.C., one of the most prestigious summer music programs in the country. It was an elite program for aspiring young musicians, so Mr. Holt had to audition and be accepted into the competitive program. “My teacher at the time suggested I audition for the Eastern Music Festival. To get in is very difficult. I remember making the audition recording at this home in White Rock Lake,” he says. The intensive six-week program only accepts four trumpets each year. Musicians are required to practice six days a week and present a full-length concert of standard orchestral repertoire at the end of the summer. “At the festival, in 1977, was James Pandolfi, who recently retired from principal trumpet at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, William Campbell, a professor of trumpet at the University of Michigan and 14-year old Wynton Marsalis. It was a magical time!” Mr. Holt says he and Mr. Marsalis became very close friends. “When I met Wynton Marsalis, he was just a skinny little kid. I remember, during the festival, we had a dance,” he says. “It was somewhat awkward because we were all musicians. We make music; we do not dance to it. At one point, Wynton got up on stage and joined the musicians. The room went virtually silent. We all knew we were witnessing something amazing ... a once-in-a-lifetime event. It was magical.”



After graduating from the University of Miami with a bachelor's degree in music, trumpet performance and a master's in music, trumpet performance, Mr. Holt moved to Florence, Italy. "I was principal trumpet of the Orchestra Del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino from 1983 to 1986, under Zubin Mehta. Every performance he conducted was magical, but my first performance was of La Traviata with Carlos Kleiber, who is regarded as one of the greatest conductors of the twentieth century. Now, that was magical!"

Now, in his twenty-ninth year with The Dallas Opera, Mr. Holt is gearing up for the upcoming season, including another free live simulcast of La Traviata at Klyde Warren Park on October 27. The performance will be simulcast live from the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House at the AT&T Performing Arts Center. Music Director Emmanuel Villaume, an internationally-acclaimed conductor, says, as first trumpet, Mr. Holt's passion for music is an inspiration to Dallas Opera orchestra members. "John is a wonderful colleague and a perfect gentleman. Being first trumpet is very stressful and he never loses his calm under pressure. It has been a joy sharing our common passion for music throughout these years," he says.



Mr. Holt's wife, Priscilla, has a Ph.D. in musicology and is the orchestra director of Centennial High School. Their daughter, Patricia, played the violin in high school and is now an accomplished golfer. She attended Bowling Green State University on a full golf scholarship and works as an assistant golf professional at Northwood Country Club in Dallas. Mr. Holt met his wife while he was playing in an orchestra in Fla. "The orchestra had just started and the principal flute player wanted her friend to come play in the orchestra. This friend turned out to be Priscilla. She had just finished a tour of Broadway shows. We played together and she never left."

In addition to playing trumpet, Mr. Holt is passionate about teaching others. He says there are two career avenues for full-time players — either the U.S. military or a full-time orchestra. The competition for jobs in both areas is strong. "Teaching students who eventually graduate and win jobs is very rewarding," he says. When Mr. Holt talks about his students and how talented they are, he becomes animated and smiles with a glow when describing their accomplishments. "Seeing a student succeed: that is the reason I teach. You can go to any school and get an education, but you go to a music school to get a job. There are many music schools that produce great performers, but there are maybe three jobs a year for trumpet players that become available. I had three students win full-time military positions this past year."

Mr. Holt recently became involved with the International Lyric Academy. A prestigious international academy that has been guiding and training students for 23 years, the Academy reached out to Mr. Holt for help in recruiting players. "I was contacted by the general manager of the International Lyric Academy, Claudio Ferri. He asked me if I was interested in joining the faculty for the summer institute. He also asked if I could help arrange auditions at UNT," he says. "I said 'yes' to both. I brought seven students from UNT, two from my wife's orchestra at Centennial High School and one student from the Greater Dallas Youth Orchestra. Everyone they auditioned was accepted. It was a fantastic summer experience for all of us. It exceeded all expectations. I look forward to an even larger presence next summer." One of the next chapters in Mr. Holt's musical life will be writing a book of hard-to-find music parts for trumpet. "Writing a book is a new challenge for me. I am writing an opera excerpt book for trumpet and it is very different. It is a slow and methodical process," he says. "My wife is helping me with the research. With the help of Shannon Highland, the librarian for The Dallas Opera, I have selected all the excerpts for the book. All the research is done and written and the accompanying CD is recorded. All that is left is to put it together and get it published. It is a time-consuming process."

people are wonderful. I love them.” Now that certainly sounds magical.

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rEDUCATIONrFor the past 13 years, the Frisco Public Library has organized the Lone Star Storytelling Festival. The fourteenth year promises to build on the solid reputation and be the best one yet! Get your tickets or learn more about this upcoming event at www.lonestarstories.org.

rFEATURErRich Allen, the owner of Tour de Profit, has identified eight categories that he feels are critical for the success of any business, as reflected in *Frisco STYLE*'s annual Best of Business Awards. Go to www.tourdeprofit.com or call 214.758.7581 for more information.

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rARTS & CULTURERThe Frisco Arts Youth Council is a group of high school students who are passionate about the arts and how the arts can impact others in the area. If you want information about joining or to see a calendar of upcoming events hosted by Frisco Arts, visit www.friscoarts.org.

rDININGrCantina Laredo boasts a menu full of fresh, flavorful cuisine inspired by the food and culture of Mexico City. The Frisco location is nestled right in the Legacy Commons area with easy access to the Dallas North Tollway and Texas State Highway 121. Call 214.618.9860 or go to www.cantinalaredo.com to see a full menu.

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ENTERTAINMENTTrThe Whistlestop Jamboree is a unique, family-friendly music festival located at the Frisco Rail Yard, complete with food trucks, a bar, games and activities, and the main event is great live music. Admission is free and this year’s event will take place Saturday, October 21. For more event information, go to www.thefriscomusicscene.com.

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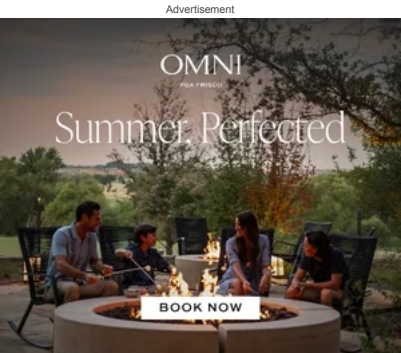
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