



# ATLSymphonyMusicians

Newsletter from the Musicians of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

May, 2014



## Four Distinguished Musicians Retire at the End of This Season

*Combined service of 182 years*

This special issue is dedicated to the four members of the ASO who are taking the opportunity to retire this season. We honor these colleagues while also remembering three more whom we lost this year:

Ralph Jones, Douglas Sommer and Ardath Weck.

Below are tributes to our retirees, pictured above: Jere Flint, Joe Walthall, Carl Nitchie and Dave Arenz

# Jere Flint

1967

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What an honor it is for me to write a few words about my colleague and section-mate, Jere Flint. I had started to feel like an “old-timer” - having had almost 4 seasons under my belt (!) - that is until I sat down and thought about Jere’s career and true legacy with the Atlanta Symphony. More than anything else, it has really made me better appreciate the history of this orchestra and the dedication of those who have watched and helped it grow

Jere came to Atlanta in 1967 while still a graduate student at the University of Washington in Seattle. Back then, job advertisements were literally posted on bulletin boards, and he saw an ad looking for musicians to come help build an orchestra with the legendary conductor, Robert Shaw. Although he was officially studying opera direction and production, he joined the ASO as a cellist, and in 1979 was asked if he could also conduct the youth orchestra. His answer: “I have no idea, but I’ll try it.” Jere has been serving the ASO – in many different ways – ever since.



When asked about some of his fondest memories with the ASO, Jere said, “The greatest joys are playing with such talented colleagues, but also knowing them socially and personally. Of course I cherish having had the opportunity to conduct this great orchestra in several hundred different concerts - and them tolerating it!” Big events, such as the European tours, stand out in his mind as being particularly special. Additionally, performing at the 1996 Olympics, at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Ojai Music Festival in California, and the Jimmy Carter Inauguration were tremendous accomplishments. “The choral performances under Shaw were always incredible. I have no idea how to calculate the number of concerts I’ve played! 7000–8000?” And that is in addition to his time

working with the students of the ASYO, whom he has tirelessly conducted, coached, and mentored for over 30 years.

So how have things changed since he joined the ASO? “The orchestra, of course, has gotten better and better from its part-time status when I came. Super players have joined. The repertoire has grown exponentially. But the warm personality - southern hospitality - really has not changed.” And while such personality is one of the many qualities that make this orchestra so great, Jere hopes that other things do change and continue to move

forward. “One always hopes for the best in the future. I hope this wasn’t the only ‘golden age’ for orchestras. Concerns are well known. Until interest and enthusiasm return to the leaders, beginning even at the top with the League of American Orchestras, musicians will always have an up-hill battle.”

We all have loved getting to know the many sides of Jere at the hall – from the laid-back, quiet stand partner to the guy running on stage in a pirate hat or declaring his love for “My Little Pony” in front of a thousand screaming 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Jere and I always share a good laugh while playing

together and I have truly enjoyed getting to know him and learning from his experience. Appropriately, he is approaching his retirement with the same relaxed manner that I’m used to seeing at the hall: “Right now I want to kick back and reflect (with a little travel and golf thrown in), and perhaps pursue other areas of interest and study. Whatever comes along, I’ll be open to it.”

From all of us at the ASO – thank you, Jere – for your decades of hard work and dedication, and our best wishes in your retirement! We’ll miss you!

– Jennifer Humphreys

# Joe Walthall

1968

Joe Walthall recalls, “I joined the orchestra in 1968, when Robert Shaw was the new Music Director. Prior to that, the orchestra was very part-time, and the musicians had other jobs, such as teaching public school, selling insurance – whatever - to make ends meet.”

He has been a stalwart in the trumpet section all the years since, ever eager to get the details correct. An archival picture now displayed in our Symphony Hall service level shows a dashing young man, trumpet in hand, right up on the podium with an equally young conductor James Levine, pouring over a complex orchestral score. One would not be surprised to see a similar scene today, with a slightly more mature trumpeter and a different young conductor on the podium.

Not too many years later, as President of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Players’ Association, Joe guided the musicians (then working little more than 30 weeks a year) through their first strike. “It lasted two days”, he says, “and though it didn’t increase our weekly salary, we were able to add more weeks of employment. That was an important move towards a full-time job.”

“I was later Personnel Manager for the ASO, until 1996”, he recalls. Many orchestras have had performing musicians as personnel managers, which eventually became two separate, full-time jobs that required two different people. Joe deftly performed both jobs for 17 years, spending many long hours in his basement office. For many of us in the orchestra, his native Atlanta drawl was the first ASO voice we ever heard. Having come through the Atlanta public schools, and having been the star trumpeter at Georgia State University, he gave us a warm welcome to the South, and to a major league orchestra. Looking back on his career highlights, Joe says, “Some of the recordings have been very



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rewarding, and obviously the tours – the one with Robert Shaw to Europe, and the one with Yoel Levi to Europe - I enjoyed those immensely.” Pressed to name a favorite ASO recording, he singles out Mahler Symphony No.5.

Regarding Robert Shaw’s famous recording, “The Many Moods of Christmas”, he remembers, “Oh yeah! And my wife is on that one, too! (Marilyn plays organ on the recording.) “She was also Mr. Shaw’s accompanist for 14 years. She did a lot of playing with the orchestra back then. Back when we had records instead of CD’s, there was more room for print on the cover, and she even got her name as organ soloist on ‘The Many Moods’. I still to this day hear people talking about it!”

Joe adds, “For whatever reason, I have never really felt the city supported the orchestra like it should have. A lot of that probably comes from the fact that most of the time our weather is so good so people tend to stay out rather than come inside for things. But you know, I daily say prayers for the orchestra going forward.”

For himself, looking ahead, he says, “Hopefully I’ll get to play a little golf, spend a lot more time with my two grandsons, and I’m sure I’ll do some volunteer work. My wife volunteers now at Northside Hospital in Forsyth, so I’ll do some work there. I enjoy working with animals, so I might

get involved with something like that.”

Is there more trumpet playing in his future? “For the most part, that’s a chapter I’m willing to look back on, but I have a very close friend who’s a retired doctor (and a former trumpet student). He plays in a community band, and I might do that, just to be with him.” However, he adds, “I’ve been playing, oh, 62 years – 46 in the ASO, and in total about 55 professionally – and that’s enough.” Yet the fellowship aspect of music making is a strong pull for all musicians; odds are Joe Walthall’s trumpet will continue to sound, even if not with the ASO. Cheers to you, Joe, on this momentous occasion!

– Bruce Kenney

# Carl Nitchie

## 1971

When you are the most senior member of the woodwind section, your presence will surely be missed upon your retirement. This will be the case for Carl Nitchie, the ASO's Principal Bassoon for the past 43 years. He has been more to this orchestra than simply a musician; Carl has been a leader on and off the stage for the musicians, and has been the most generous colleague with whom I could have ever hoped to work.

Hired by Robert Shaw in 1971, Carl began his time in Atlanta as Second Bassoon, and won the Principal position the next year. When asked to recall some of his greatest joys with the ASO, Carl spoke of the rare opportunity he had to play in the same orchestra as his violist wife, Heidi, for 38 years. I once asked Heidi how she felt when Carl played a big bassoon solo and she stated she was always more nervous than he seemed to be! Other memories from Carl that came to mind were touring with the Orchestra to Europe and Carnegie Hall, experiencing the great music venues of the world, and showing those audiences that we are among the best. I counted the number of Carnegie Hall appearances Carl has made - and they number over 20. What he is most proud of is leaving a legacy of Atlanta Symphony recordings to his family, students, and the public. Topping Carl's list of greatest experiences has been having the chance to work with the outstanding musicians of the ASO. Never during his student years did he dare to imagine that he'd be making music with an orchestra at this level - and there has hardly been a day in his time with the ASO that he hasn't thought about how incredibly lucky he has been.



When Carl first joined the orchestra, it had just recently become a full-time orchestra. He considers the performance expectations to be much higher now than they were back then in 1971. According to Carl, there were many fine musicians in those early days, but the depth of talent in the orchestra now is "awe inspiring". "While the hall has changed very little over the years, I have been pleased to be able to play in the new shell. When I joined the orchestra the season was 40 weeks long. Achieving a 52-week season was a titanic accomplishment, and slipping back to 41/42 weeks has been a severe disappointment." Carl would have liked to have been a part of the opening of a new concert hall, and he continues to hope that a new hall is somewhere in the orchestra's near future. "I know that we have many strong and enthusiastic supporters, but I hope that someday the greater population of the city of Atlanta will recognize what an irreplaceable treasure they have in the ASO."

Looking ahead to a time when he doesn't have to have the perfect bassoon reed every week, Carl plans to continue playing and teaching the bassoon - something that is very much a part of his life. "Atlanta will continue to be our home for now, but Heidi and I plan to spend a great deal more time with our seven year old grandson in Michigan, as well as other traveling. You may also find me on my sailboat on Lake Lanier. I am going to be compiling and organizing my family genealogy, a longtime hobby of mine. Finally, I am looking forward to the opportunity to be an ASO audience member; you will see me out there regularly. Heidi and I will always consider ourselves to be a part of the ASO family. Oh, also I have been told that I will be watching "24" regularly."

We will miss Carl's "first onstage, last offstage" commitment to the ASO, as well as his singing bassoon sound. Much happiness and more gardening for you, Carl!

Your friend and steadfast Second Bassoonist,  
*Laura Najarian*

# David Arenz

## 1968

Sending off our wonderful friend and colleague David Arenz into retirement should be a celebration; we are proud to honor his lifelong dedication to our art form and to our wonderful orchestra. Yet I, as well as many others, will miss his presence profoundly from our everyday life at the ASO. We musicians are a family, and in many ways, our colleagues at work end up becoming an extension of our own family. I have had the pleasure of making music within a few feet of David in numerous performances over two decades, and he has played a big part in making my time at the ASO a wonderful experience.

David Arenz, the ASO's Principal Second Violin, has led his section with distinction, professionalism, wit, and just plain old fun for 45 years, and he is retiring this coming June. He joined the ASO in 1969 - then under the direction of Robert Shaw - at 22 years old, and was one of 18 new members of the orchestra that year.

David enjoyed seeing the growth of the ASO from a 36-week to a 52-week full time orchestra, which remained in effect until the summer of 2012. He fondly remembers the tours the orchestra would take all over the country. Some of his favorite places to visit were in Florida because he was able to play golf in the morning and then perform orchestra concerts in the evening - only to repeat this schedule the next day in a new city. Traveling between venues enabled David and his friends to also enjoy a friendly game of poker in the back of the bus, which has steadily become an ASO tradition over the years. He also recalled how the ASO stayed on the Queen Mary one year on the West Coast when Sammy Davis Jr. bought out the venue intended for the orchestra performance that evening for his own show. As a result, David was very happy to instead attend a live taping of Johnny Carson with his colleagues that evening.



When asked what some of his most memorable performances have been with the ASO, David did not hesitate to state that “there were too many to count, and it has been a true honor to make music with his colleagues as a member of this great orchestra.”

As David Arenz prepares for a new chapter in his life - filled with travel, golf, and the occasional Wednesday lunch visits with his colleagues at the ASO - he reflected on where the ASO has been and what he wishes for its future ... “I am happy to be retiring with 3 other colleagues of mine whom I have had the pleasure of building lifelong friendships with. It would be great to see our orchestra get back to where we were before the lockout of 2012. Everyone in the ASO organization needs to work together in a fair manner to alleviate the financial stress many have been under for some time ... I would like the orchestra to be treated fairly.”

We will miss David, but we are very happy that he is entering a new and fulfilling chapter in his life. May your retirement be filled with many years of joy and relaxation – something hard earned and well-deserved after your many years performing as a member of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

–Danny Laufer

### Pre-Concert ASO Chamber Music Series:

We are very thankful to announce that **Ken and Carolyn Meltzer** are sponsoring the 2013-14 season of pre-concert chamber music concerts through a generous personal gift. Please join us in thanking them and stay tuned through our Facebook page and newsletter for the next upcoming concert, May 29.