



Our Players' Voice

From the Musicians of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic
March 2022

FORT WAYNE'S BRIGHT MUSICAL FUTURE

by Diane Dickson

"Fort Wayne is the fastest growing metro area in the Great Lakes region" is a headline that's been in the news a lot lately. When you delve into why that is, it can boggle your mind. It does mine. It is a delightful challenge to keep track of the latest and greatest going on in our community.

The construction of Parkview Field in 2009 got the proverbial ball rolling, followed by the Ash Brokerage Skyline Tower. Billions of dollars have been invested since then, leading to Promenade Park and the mixed-use buildings near it: Electric Works, The Landing redevelopment, The Bradley Boutique Hotel, Lutheran Downtown, and the Lofts at Headwaters Park. According to the Downtown Improvement District, the city is investing a billion dollars a year in projects. And Greater Fort Wayne Inc., the local chamber alliance, is working towards making Fort Wayne a nationally recognized economy in 2022 and beyond.

Major companies are expanding and investing here. Fort Wayne has one of the lowest jobless rates in the nation. We've garnered national attention as a hot spot destination with world-class restaurants, arts and culture, miles of urban trails, rivers to explore, and cool places to hang out. Our

downtown is changing into a residential mecca for people moving here from larger urban areas like Chicago, New York City, and California. Fort Wayne is fast becoming the place people want to visit and live.

What I find particularly exciting is the recognition by community leaders that the arts, particularly music, are integral to economic development. Greater Fort Wayne Inc. has crafted a strategic plan that would be a blueprint for the community's growth over the next 10 years. Known as the Allen County Together economic development action plan (ACT), a top innovative goal was to support and market Fort Wayne as a "Top-10 Music City" by 2031.

I spoke with Ellen Cutter, Chief Economic Development Officer of Greater Fort Wayne Inc., to learn the rationale behind this goal. She explained that a steering committee, made up of business, non-profit and local government leaders guided the planning process. This committee conducted a lengthy discovery phase that analyzed local and national best practices. From that process, our existing local arts scene was identified as a major driver for quality-of-life in Fort Wayne.

First, the arts define Fort Wayne as a destination. "Our market is defined as a 60 mile radius around Fort Wayne," said Ellen. "There are 1.5 million people within these 60 miles that

consider Fort Wayne to be 'their city' for working, shopping, restaurants, and attending concerts, arts and sports events," she said.

Secondly, Allen County has had population increases annually for the last five years because of their efforts to increase net domestic migration. Ellen said that attracting people from other parts of the country to move here is considered the best way to reverse the brain drain that had been going on for over a decade. In addition to having high paying jobs and a variety of housing and educational choices, strong cultural amenities that encompass a range of entertainment options are essential.

During their discovery phase, Ellen said the steering committee developed a sense of respect for other communities who grew and marketed what was unique about their community. The committee admired how they staked out bold goals and "had the courage to go out on a limb and do something about it," she said.

The steering committee recognized Fort Wayne's significant musical assets for a city of its size. They saw the potential for our musical community to contribute to the quality-of-place attributes needed to help Fort Wayne grow. By making the "Top 10 Music City" a goal, they gave the community's musical

creative talent a starring role in arts and culture development.

Kirk Moriarty, Director of Downtown and Urban Development of Greater Fort Wayne Inc., elaborated further by recognizing the value of a full-time, resident symphony orchestra. “Resident musicians provide immeasurable value by spurring the creative element in the community,” said Kirk. “We are a social species, with a strong desire to connect with one another. Arts events and live orchestra concerts provide that opportunity and have enormous impact,” he said.

Kirk believes in the power of the “wow” experience-- events or experiences that captivate and excite people beyond their expectations. “Providing a variety of exciting performances brings enormous value to the community. It is so important to increase the number of orchestra concerts, to expand,” he said.

Ellen said Fort Wayne’s big changes in the last five years have enabled the city to emerge from the pandemic in a strong position of growth. As a result,

many community and non-profit organizations are thinking about their next steps. “They are taking a fresh look at how to fulfill their mission and best serve the interests of a growing community,” said Ellen. “They see the opportunities in a higher growth economy.”

As residents of this community, the musicians of the Philharmonic are excited about Fort Wayne’s booming growth. It also inspires questions about our orchestra’s own future. Will the orchestra leadership embrace new strategies to serve the needs of our growing community? Which role will the Philharmonic play in the aspiration to become a “Top 10 Music City?”

A symphony orchestra provides compelling audience experiences unique to our art form. Will Philharmonic concerts be exciting and relevant to audiences and inspire the “Wow” experience?

The ACT plan emphasizes collaboration among community stakeholders to inspire action. As Ellen said, “The word

TOGETHER was a very intentional use of the word.” Will the Philharmonic leadership collaborate with other organizations, creating new ways of expression to add to our existing ones? Will the orchestra appeal to diverse tastes and increase its presence in the community?

As we consider these questions, the musicians thank you, our supporters, for your continued support and interest. We certainly feel this is a watershed moment in our city’s history, one of unprecedented growth and big dreams. Perhaps the ACT plan’s aspirations might inspire a shared vision between the Philharmonic leadership, the musicians, the concert-going public, and the community-proud people of Fort Wayne about the orchestra’s place in our city’s bright future.

If you would like to know more about the ACT plan, it can be found on Greater Fort Wayne Inc.’s website at <https://www.greaterfortwayneinc.com/bold-projects/allen-county-together/>

ALISON CHORN

Principal Percussion with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic

Interviewed by Gayle Fick

Do you remember when you first became interested in classical music?

When I was 7 years old I started piano lessons, and that’s when my love for classical music started. My very first favorite composer was Mozart.

What made you think that you wanted to play percussion? How many different instruments does that involve? Was it your first interest? Do you play any other instruments?

I loved playing piano, but when I reached the 5th grade, I also wanted to join the school band program. I couldn’t play piano in band, so the decision (made entirely by my elementary school band director) was between percussion and flute. She chose percussion because experience with piano is very

helpful with the mallet instruments. I continued to play both piano and percussion all the way through college. Percussion involves anything you can hit, scrape, or shake. The sky’s the limit! The typical instruments we play when we audition for an orchestra include marimba, xylophone, glockenspiel, snare drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, bass drum, and sometimes castanets.

What inspired you to choose to make music your livelihood?

Music was a big part of my life from a young age, and I couldn't see myself doing anything else. Participating in youth orchestra was what made me want to play in an orchestra as a career.

Did anyone try to talk you out of becoming a professional musician?

Not directly, but I was lectured repeatedly on how much hard work it takes to "make it."

Do you listen to classical music very much during your off time?

Yes, I love discovering new recordings I haven't heard before along with listening to the classics.

What are your top three favorite composers to listen to? To play? Why are they your favorites?

My favorite composers to listen to would be Mahler, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff. They all take you on such a journey through their writing, and I never get tired of listening. My favorite composers to play in the orchestra would be Mahler, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev. They wrote some of the best orchestral percussion parts, and I love to see those names come up in our season.

What are your favorite genres of music to listen to? Have there been times in your life when you were able to perform that type of music?

Ever since I was little I loved classical music, so I definitely listen to that the most. However, I am very open minded when it comes to music, and I'll listen to just about anything. I played some jazz and rock on drum set when I was growing up as well.

What's the best part of performing for you?

The best part of performing for me is sharing something beautiful with the audience. Being able to exist in a moment of beauty or raw emotion can make it feel like time stands still, and that's the best part for me. There are concerts I've attended and played on stage that I will never forget.



Do you prefer performing with small ensembles, chamber orchestra, or the full orchestra?

I like the intimacy of playing in chamber or small ensemble groups, but I also love being a small part in a huge orchestra.

How do you deal with the occasional high volumes required of the orchestra?

When volumes get too loud, we use earplugs to save our hearing.

What is the farthest you have traveled in order to play (either a gig, or for a festival, concert series, etc.)?

When I am not playing with the Philharmonic I am most likely playing with another orchestra somewhere else, and that always involves driving. The orchestras I play with the most are the Indianapolis Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, and most recently, the Pittsburgh Symphony. Every summer I participate in the Lakes Area Music Festival in Brainerd, MN.

That's about an 11 hour drive from Fort Wayne and is probably the farthest.

How do you stay inspired as a musician?

I look for inspiration in the music I'm playing every day, no matter what it is. Sometimes, the most inspiration comes from when I'm not playing and just listening to my colleagues.

How often do you work on music that YOU want to play as opposed to what is on the next Phil program?

Most of my time is consumed with preparing for upcoming concerts. Since I am the Principal Percussionist, this also includes administrative duties such as dividing the parts and making sure we have all the correct equipment and personnel hired. This can take up a lot of my time depending on how involved the percussion is on the program, and I have to always be looking ahead.

During the pandemic year of no Philharmonic, and few live music gigs, how did you stay inspired and/or busy? With all the uncertainty, were you able to use the time to work on music you might not have had time to work on during the season?

What changes did you have to make to make ends meet, or use up any time or energy you might have otherwise spent on music?

I made some video projects, but I mostly tried to take the time to go back to the basics in my technique. When it's not pandemic times, I am usually so busy working I don't have much time for anything else. It was nice to be able to practice what I wanted to practice, but it was also difficult at times to stay inspired.

When the pandemic hit, my parents invited me to come stay with them in Minnesota. I packed up what I could and spent most of the lockdown there.

What do you do to unwind? What do you like to do in your spare time? Hobbies or other interests? pets?

My boyfriend Campbell (Principal Clarinetist of the Philharmonic) and I enjoy playing competitive foosball. If we ever have a rare weekend off from concerts, you can most likely find us at a foosball tournament. Over the pandemic, I also got really into baking and made a lot of bread and a couple of Swiss rolls. We have two wonderful cats, and I've been an animal lover my whole life.

What advice would you give a high school student who might be contemplating a career playing in an orchestra? To your own students?

It's extremely difficult to make a living being an orchestral musician, and because of this, you must be prepared for more rejection than success. Learning how to take criticism less personally is also important. Just because you can't play something doesn't equate to being a bad thing.

Alison will be featured in the upcoming Masterworks Concert on March 19th. She and timpanist, **Eric Schweikert**, will perform a Double Timpani Concerto by Oliverio. Below are some photos from our February 19th Masterworks Concert, featuring **Chance Trottman-Huiet**, Principal Tuba.



iPad with foot pedal for speedy page turns prepped by concertmaster Violetta Todorova to perform Kevin Puts' *River's Rush*. Photos courtesy of Violetta Todorova



Chance presented a stunning interpretation of John Williams' Tuba Concerto. Photo courtesy of Linda Kanzawa



Chance with his former professor and friends from Michigan State. Photo courtesy of Chance Trottman-Huiet

Our Players' Voice is published by the Fort Wayne Philharmonic Players' Association. Our writers for this issue are Diane Dickson, retired Philharmonic oboist and Gayle Fick, wife of Principal Bassoonist Dennis Fick. For more information, visit our website at www.fwpmusicians.com. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).