

Sarah Bierhaus

AND THE BEST OF BOULDER

WRITTEN BY JESSICA BAUTERS

Audiences up and down the Front Range have been enjoying the artistry of oboist Sarah Bierhaus for years. From Colorado Springs and Central City to the Lamont School of Music at the University of Denver and of course Boulder –where she holds the position of Principal Oboist at the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, sponsored by Eleanor & Harry Poehlmann – Sarah’s oboe playing has delighted and inspired music lovers.

And the feeling is mutual.

“I love performing in Boulder,” Sarah says. “It really is special here. Many of the musicians in the Phil play all over Colorado, but we particularly love Boulder, and we’re always happy to play here.”

Sarah’s among other familiar names featured on the program at the Phil’s Feb. 11 concert, dubbed “The Best of Boulder.” Along with fellow Front Range oboist Max Soto, she will perform the virtuosic – and often cheeky – *Extra(ordinarily) Fancy* by Viet Cuong. Referred to by Music Director Michael Buttermann as, “a cross between Vivaldi and dueling banjos,” *Extra(ordinarily) Fancy* is a concerto for two oboes rich with back-and-forth dialogue and multiphonics brought to life by the unique voice of the oboe.

“I love the idea of multiphonics being used melodically in this playful context. Usually you encounter multiphonics in more avant garde pieces, in a more atonal setting, but here specific pitch matters. It’s really fun and really fresh.

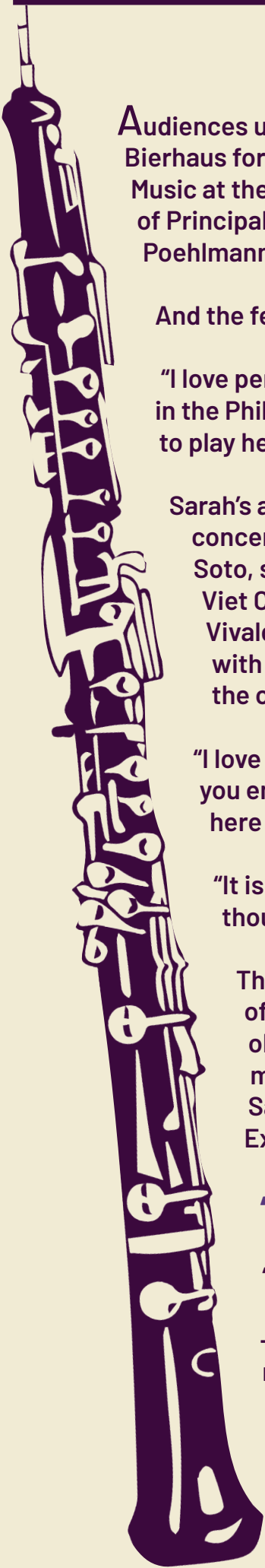
“It is a strange sound, though. At one point I was practicing and my daughter thought the fire alarm was going off!”

The composer is quoted as describing the piece as, “a whimsical exploration of duality; while one oboist is focused on sounding ordinarily fancy, the other oboist is determined to prove the extra fancy virtues of multiphonics.” While multiphonics are not what one might expect from the often tuneful oboe, Sarah – who says she performs the “ordinarily fancy” part in the piece – says *Extra(ordinarily) Fancy* works so well for oboe precisely because it is unexpected.

“The best thing about the oboe is the sound,” Sarah says.

“I’ve spent so much of my life trying to play with the best possible tone. So having a piece like this that’s all about being able to make that beautiful sound – but also really strange sounds at the same time – that juxtaposition works really well.”

While preparing for the piece, Sarah says she’s been standing up and stepping outside her comfort zone. With few recordings of *Extra(ordinarily) Fancy* out there, she’s been finding her inspiration in the practice room.



"I've spent a lot of time mentally preparing myself for being out there in front of the orchestra. I haven't done a whole lot of concertizing before, so it's a different kind of preparation. For example, I've been standing up when I practice, just to get used to being center stage. I've also been working on my mental toughness, partly through some grueling practice sessions but also with some extra challenging workouts – tough hill runs, sprints in the pool, etc. – to get used to overcoming that voice of self doubt that can creep in when I'm feeling the pressure.

"Max and I haven't put our parts together yet, but he and I have played a lot together so I anticipate a lot of laughter when we play this piece. It's good-natured ribbing between the two of us, which I think the audience will really enjoy."

The Cuong piece is just one feast for the ears on the menu for the Best of Boulder performance. Also on the program are Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme, featuring CU Boulder College of Music cellist David Requiro; Pulitzer Prize-winner Caroline Shaw's *Entr'acte*; and Mozart's brilliant "Jupiter" Symphony. Sarah says the concert will be a full-circle experience – for a couple of reasons.

"It's a real honor to be featured in the program called 'The Best of Boulder.' My audition with the Boulder Phil 19 years ago was my first successful audition ever. That's pretty special. The Mozart is also meaningful to me, because this was the symphony we performed at my first-ever professional orchestra gig with the Cayuga Chamber Players in Ithaca. So that will also be a special feeling"

It's a special feeling that will surely be shared by all those in attendance at Macky Auditorium.

Boulder is a city of idealists in a way, which is why I felt so at home when I came here. It's full of deep thinkers and curious minds, and that really builds a unique audience.



"I think idealism is something that speaks to me. Music has an element of idealism. An orchestra is a microcosm of an ideal society, where we're speaking a universal language, striving to make something beautiful, and give the audience an opportunity to get some catharsis and relief – even spiritual connection through the music. And I feel that particularly when performing in Boulder."

