

Orchestra Next would develop musicians into professionals

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The whole thing got started when Brian McWhorter found out that Eugene Ballet wasn't using live musicians anymore for its Christmas performances of "The Nutcracker."

"To me that's almost a cardinal sin," said McWhorter, a professional trumpet player who teaches at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance. "When I was in New York playing Broadway, we had to protest the Broadway houses' use of prerecorded music in shows.

"I was on the picket lines. I get kind of pumped up about this."

Although it had contracted in the past with musicians from the Eugene Symphony to play in its "Nutcracker" performances, Eugene Ballet - strapped, like most arts groups, by the recession - has used recorded music here for the last four years.

The obvious solution might have been to raise money for the ballet to hire musicians. McWhorter had another idea.

"What if I can get an orchestra together?" he said. "A training orchestra. A place where students can sit next to professionals."

Eugene has various levels of classical orchestras, from the Eugene Symphony and the Oregon Mozart Players on the professional end of the spectrum to the University Symphony and the various Arts Umbrella student orchestras in town. But none gives students the opportunity to perform side by side with working pros.

Enter Orchestra Next, McWhorter's idea. He's drafted 15 professional musicians to take on the principal roles and is looking for up to 30 students to take part. And after some discussion about the challenges involved, the Eugene Ballet has signed on enthusiastically, Managing Director Riley Grannan said.

"It's cool," Grannan said. "A training orchestra. A perfect thing for students. And I'm confident this will work."

Anything can happen

The challenges, of course, are many: The ballet's professional dancers will be performing a showcase work to music played by students led by a conductor - McWhorter himself - they've never dealt with on the podium.

The biggest problem, of course, is in the timing. Dancers love performing to taped music, because it never varies from one performance to the next.

In live music, anything can happen - and does.

"We're interested in the quality of the music," Grannan said. "There is a potential for train wrecks, so we've invested in this group by adding rehearsal time."

Using professional musicians playing a familiar work such as "Nutcracker," the ballet typically would do only one full rehearsal with the orchestra before the show. They've scheduled three rehearsals for Orchestra Next.

That brings up the question of money. The professional musicians in Orchestra Next will be paid at full union rates, McWhorter said, although he's trying to negotiate a lower rate for future performances. And the student musicians will be paid a \$250 stipend for their work.

With three rehearsals, that brings the cost of the training orchestra up to roughly the same as what a full professional orchestra would cost.

So McWhorter is trying to raise money to support Orchestra Next's work in "The Nutcracker" and to help create future programs for the orchestra in the coming year.

To do this, he's been running around town lining up corporate sponsors and has started a Web-based donation campaign on IndieGoGo. As of last week, it had raised just \$620 of its \$20,000 goal.

McWhorter said he is determined to make the orchestra happen.

"This has been a dream of mine for some time. If I have to finance it myself, I'll finance it myself."

McWhorter said he's received a lot of expressions of support from the community - as well as some concern that Orchestra Next was undercutting professional musicians. That, he said, isn't quite true.

"In the end, we're going to be more expensive for the Eugene Ballet than the Eugene Symphony would have been, because we're rehearsing more."

Meanwhile, he loves the idea of conducting his own orchestra.

"It's a dream come true for me," McWhorter said. "I feel giddy. It's a tremendous thing.

"But really, my interest is in the opportunities for kids. So if Danail (Rachev, the Eugene Symphony's conductor) wants to step in - he is welcome."

ORECHESTRA NEXT

What: A training orchestra for Eugene headed by trumpet player and UO music professor Brian McWhorter offering the opportunity for pre-professional classical musicians to play in an orchestra alongside established pros

Funding: McWhorter is trying to raise \$20,000 to get Orchestra Next started toward accompanying the Eugene Ballet's four performances of "The Nutcracker" in December; tax-deductible contributions can be made at indiegogo.com/fundorchestranext

Who can apply: Pre-professional student musicians of any age

Audition: Prospective student musicians should upload an audition video to YouTube or Vimeo by

Nov. 25; see details at OrchestraNext.com

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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