

MEET THE MUSICIAN

Bassist Rick Robinson Goes the Extra Mile for Music

BY SCOTT ROUSH

Musician, conductor, arranger, publisher, composer, band leader – Rick Robinson is not one to be idle, content with just “playing the notes,” as he says. The DSO bassist is busy all the time with different projects, especially the CutTime Players ensemble.

Through his endeavors, Robinson seeks to educate people about classical music who otherwise would not listen to it.

“By bringing music to the people with recitals, chamber music, and other ventures, I can help non-musicians understand how profound and life-changing classical music can be,” he says.

Getting people hooked on classical music has taken Robinson’s career in several directions, including the founding of his acclaimed ensemble CutTime Players; composing and transcribing pieces for chamber groups and orchestras; conducting around metro Detroit; and printing music for composer Adolphus Hailstork, the Michigan Bach Society and the DSO.

Music is a passion Robinson has had his entire life. A Detroit native, he grew up in a musical family – his mother

played the piano and sang, while his older brother and sister played the cello and violin. After his siblings left for college, Robinson started to play the cello as

well. He soon realized he was “lousy” and switched to bass, which he loves for the deep sound it produces.

He took private lessons and furthered his studies at the prestigious Interlochen Arts Academy. He admits he wasn’t the best student when he arrived at the Northern Michigan high school, but he soon discovered what an excellent

opportunity he had there.

“Interlochen was a great place to learn about all kinds of Western art,” he says. “That’s when I decided I wanted to be as well rounded a musician as I could be.”

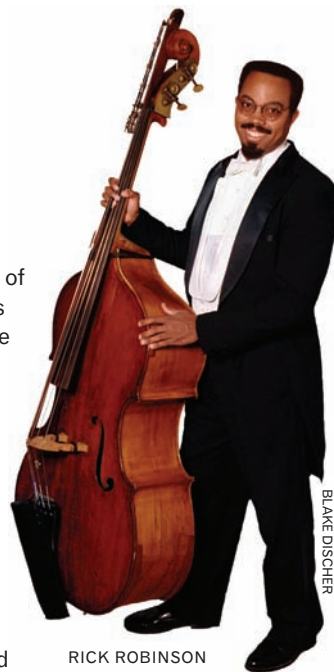
After Interlochen, Robinson went to the Cleveland Institute of Music, earning a Bachelors of Music degree. His graduate studies took him to Boston at the New England Conservatory. He served as Principal Bass of the Portland (Maine) Symphony Orchestra and Assistant Principal Bass of the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra. After substituting for the DSO for a time, he joined the orchestra permanently in 1989.

At the time, Robinson was only one of two African-Americans in the DSO. While he feels the orchestra has made great strides in helping increase the number of African-Americans who are major orchestra quality through initiatives such as the African-American Fellowship Program, he still believes there is opportunity for growth in that

area. Robinson says one key is reaching out to the community to educate children and show them music is universal. “We need to encourage more participation

at the grade school level and bring music to the public schools,” he says. “If people can just close their eyes and forget about the visual aspect, I think people can really get hooked into where the music can take them.”

Reaching out led Robinson to form CutTime Players in 1995, an eight-piece ensemble comprised of DSO musicians.



RICK ROBINSON

BLAKE DISCHER

The group has played and taught throughout metro Detroit and northern Michigan. He came up with the idea for the group in Cleveland while playing Stravinsky’s *The Soldier’s Tale*.

He envisioned playing great orchestral music in a chamber setting and CutTime Players was born. He also publishes music scores for various groups

through CutTime Productions. In the future, he hopes to produce CDs and videos for children, including Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*.

Recently, Robinson has ventured into composing, which includes the DSO premiere of “Essay No. 1: After Sibelius” at last season’s Classical Roots concerts. He has just finished a string sextet, which he will premiere at Kerrytown Concert House in Ann Arbor on March 30.

“I never thought I would be able to write melodies and connect them, it’s turning out to be easier than I thought,” he says. “I’m only writing now in conventional modes, music that I would like to play. I’m starting to find my voice.”

When Robinson does have free time, he enjoys sailing, running and spending time with his fiancé Cathy and her two sons. Now living on the east side of Detroit, Robinson likens exploring classical music to sailing.

“It’s like being on a sailboat as opposed to a motorboat, which is fast and an electric experience,” he says. “Sailing is much more adventurous, you can’t go directly upwind, you have to wind your way there. There’s a lot of satisfaction that comes from going on that adventure.”

Scott Roush is Publications Manager at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. You can reach him at sroush@dso.org.



HART HOLLIMAN

CUTTIE PLAYERS AT THE MAX M. FISHER MUSIC CENTER. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ROBERT WILLIAMS, KEVIN GOOD, RICK ROBINSON, GEOFFREY APPLIGATE, RANDALL HAWES, SHARON SPARROW AND THEODORE OIEN.