

ASPEN FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Today, Matthew Lengas is the second oboe on stage.

MATTHEW LENGAS *Oboe*

Like a musical fingerprint, the reed of an oboe is the key to an oboist's identity. While all instruments provide an opportunity for individuality and creative expression, the oboe does so in a unique way, as oboists must make their own reeds. Minnesota-based oboist Matthew Lengas often scours antique stores in search of vintage sharpening stones, which he uses to maintain his reed knives. By whittling wood and shaping it to suit his instrument's nuances, Lengas crafts his own identity.

As someone who can distinguish orchestras on the radio by the sound of the oboist, Lengas says, "The process [of reed making] gives us the ability to tailor our instrument to our physiology and adapt it to meet our highest ideals of beauty."

These ideals, along with a true love for music, were instilled into Lengas from an early age by his father, who played guitar and sang to him and his siblings. After watching a 1992 Moody Blues concert on VHS, he finally had his first 'ah-ha' moment. "This concert [at the Red Rocks Amphitheater] was performed alongside the Colorado Symphony, and hearing the oboist on that video piqued my interest," Lengas said. Soon after, Lengas picked up the oboe and began his musical journey.

From performing in the fifth grade band to joining the Green Bay Youth Symphony Orchestra, Lengas fell in love with orchestral music and the feeling of being a valued component of a large, cohesive ensemble. His love never faded and Lengas went on to pursue music in college. As an undergraduate at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, his teacher gave him an unforgettable piece of advice: "Play! Don't 'un-play'." Lengas said, "He told me this many times, but I remember one instance with great clarity when I was holding back and playing very tentatively in a lesson. I have a recording of that lesson and listen to it often. Thinking of this helps me clear my mind and just play."

Taking this advice with him, Lengas continued his education at Rice University's Shephard School of Music for his master's degree, and the University of Texas at Austin's Butler School of Music for his Doctor of Musical Arts degree.

Now 31 years old, Lengas is in his fourth season with the Festival. He feels inspired by the Aspen community and says, "The faculty and fellow students here are incredibly talented, hardworking, and share their knowledge generously. This creates a uniquely productive learning environment, and it's what has kept me coming back."

As a member of the Aspen Chamber Symphony and the Aspen Festival Orchestra, Lengas is most looking forward to performing alongside his teacher Alex Klein. For Lengas, everything seems to be coming full circle as he remembers listening to Klein's recordings every day as a young oboist.

Lengas is committed to passing down what he's learned to young oboists, holding true to the concept of uniqueness. As a teacher, he says, "Instead of simply trying to help students sound the way I sound, I want to encourage them to use my ideas as a benchmark by which to judge other possibilities. I believe individuality can be enhanced and celebrated through creative instruction, [so] I strive to meet students wherever they are in their artistic journey. From there, we can move forward together."

Matthew Lengas is a recipient of the Bowers Noyce Oboe Fellowship

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