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BY: MICHAEL ELLINGTON

performing with a complex and melodious brass instrument. This issue, the Los Angeles Police Concert Band member profile focuses the starring spotlight on French horn player Mark Kobavashi.



Mark Whorn

During this time of COVID, Mark logs some serious miles on his bicycle and laps while swimming. These pursuits are a natural extension of his approach to his instrument practice regimen... like an athlete. "Brass playing is very physical, while the music is fairly simple. The trick is to be in good enough shape to perform the program successfully."

Mark started playing the horn when he was 12 years old. That started during a summer session band class at the school across the street from his house. His first instrument was the string bass. He didn't



Pre concert warm up.

stay with it because his junior high school didn't have an orchestra. He was raised in Boulder, Colo., and Honolulu. The only other musician in the family was his uncle, a violinist and concertmaster in a high school orchestra. Mark counts the late Roger Pyle as one of his major influences. In college, he studied with this longtime member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Mark played his chosen horn in his high school orchestra as well as a youth orchestra. Further performance experience in college led to a six-year contract with an orchestra that traveled overseas. He remembers that horn section as the best he's ever worked with. "We all got along as friends. Later, I learned that this isn't always the case with working situations, even with top-notch groups." That contract involved a position as sub-principal horn with the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra. A highlight of that stint was a concert tour with the orchestra of Taiwan.

The French horn has a sound that has been described as a "mellow, dark and veiled timbre." To add to the complexity of playing this instrument, the musician has to not only regulate the air he blows into the mouthpiece and finger the three valve levers, but there's one more nuance to address. This horn tends not to be completely in tune throughout the entire scale. Trumpet players can adjust valves on the fly to change the intonation. French horn players accomplish this same thing by placement and shape of their hands inside the bells of their instruments. Mark does this by positioning his hand just so and closing it slightly to make a given note

flatter. To make a note sharper, he opens his hand slightly. Mark says he enjoys playing this particular horn because of the sounds he is able to create.

Since the entire Band had not been able to rehearse since the beginning of the pandemic, in September, he helped found a very health-conscious, socially distanced collection of musicians from the Band called The Brass Quintet. It's been some time since he's performed in front of an audience. "I was really thrilled because this breaks a half-year fast from any kind of live music situation that I've been involved in. The last concert I did was in March." Mark has found that playing with the quintet has renewed his enthusiasm and given him "his right arm back."

For more information about the Band, see our website at www.lasown.com and contact Jim Starr, executive director, at sngcop@aol.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapolicyfoundation.org, and in the "Comments" box, put "For the Band." ♦



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