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ROCO Brass finds a place to toot its horn

By Colin Eatock | October 2, 2015

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Photo: Courtesy River Oaks

IMAGE 1 OF 2

The River Oaks Chamber Orchestra Brass Quintet will present its own concert series at the new Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston, starting Friday.

After years of honking their horns all over town, the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra Brass Quintet has finally found a place to park.

The five musicians in the ensemble all play in Houston's River Oaks Chamber Orchestra. In the past half-decade, they've also performed as a quintet, under the ROCO banner, at Bayou Bend, the Saint Arnold Brewing Co. and several other venues.

But now the ROCO Brass has a concert series to call its own. The first of three concerts takes place Friday at the Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston. They'll play in Box 4 - a 329-seat theater that's the largest of the four performance spaces at the shiny new facility.

Trumpeter George Chase, who is a member of the ROCO Brass, is excited about playing at the MATCH.

"I think the MATCH will be really great for the companies performing there," he says. "It will help to strengthen ties among arts organization."

However, what the ROCO Brass is doing at the MATCH is a little bit unusual. Most professional brass quintets - such as the Canadian Brass, for example - are touring groups, traveling from one city to another. It's uncommon for such an ensemble to set up shop in a specific hall and present its own concert series.

"There's a lot of advantages to playing in the same place," Chase explains. "People are comfortable with it, and they'll know where to find you. The full River Oaks Chamber Orchestra is associated with St. John the Divine Church, and now the quintet has a home base, too."

As well, he believes that, over time, the MATCH will have a transformational effect on the ROCO Brass.

"When we play there," he predicts, "it will shape our sound, and how we play together. I'm looking forward to that."

Friday's concert has music by Duke Ellington - "Caravan," "Boy Meets Horn" and "Jungle Nights in Harlem." The program also includes Robert Maggio's "A Sense of Space," written in 2007 to celebrate the opening of a concert hall at West Chester University in Pennsylvania.

MORE INFORMATION

River Oaks Chamber Orchestra Brass Quintet

When: 7:30 p.m. Friday

Where: the MATCH, 3400 Main

Tickets: \$10-\$25; 713-665-2700, rocohouston.org

TRANSLATOR

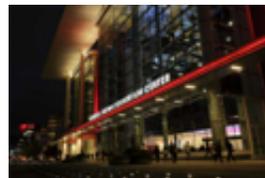
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Chase says most of the quintet's repertoire - scored for two trumpets, French horn, trombone and bass trombone or tuba - will be new to Houston audiences.

"We like to explore a variety of repertoire," Chase notes. "And as a genre, the brass quintet is fairly new, an invention of the 20th century. One of our challenges is just getting people to become aware of what we have to offer."

The 44-year-old trumpeter, originally from Schenectady, N.Y., came to Houston in the mid 1990s to study at Rice University. When he arrived, he had no plans to stay permanently. But since then, he has seen an encouraging expansion of the city's arts scene.

"Musically, there wasn't nearly the variety of offerings there is today. It's been great to watch Houston grow in that way. There are all kinds of things going on - and Houstonians support the arts."

Chase has played in the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra since it was created in 2005 and is also a founding member of the ROCO Brass Quintet.

Even though the ROCO Brass now has a home, Chase is quick to point out the group will still play at locations throughout the greater Houston area.

"We'll continue to perform in other venues," he says. "Certainly, the quintet can go places that

the full orchestra can't."

The ROCO Brass series at the MATCH continues on Jan. 22 and March 4.

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