

STAR



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MUSIC

Bassoonist to play rare French concerto at concerts



**Kristin Wolfe
Jensen is the
River Oaks
Chamber
Orchestra's
principal
bassoonist.**

Courtesy photo

By Steven Brown

When Kristin Wolfe Jensen was a middle-school student in Connecticut, flutists made up half of her school's band. She was one of them — until being part of a crowd started to bother her.

"I wanted to pick the weird thing so I could be different," Jensen says. "I didn't know what a bassoon sounded like, but I knew that no one else played it."

Ever since the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra

River Oaks Chamber Orchestra

When: 5 p.m. Saturday at the Church of St. John the Divine, 2450 River Oaks Blvd.; 5 p.m. Sunday at Grace Presbyterian Church, 10221 Ella Lee Lane

Tickets: \$20-\$25; 713-665-2700, rocohouston.org

debuted in 2005, Jensen has been its principal bassoonist — commuting from Austin, where she's professor of bassoon at the University of Texas.

In this weekend's "ROCO Celebrates France," the orchestra will feature Jensen in a concerto by Francois Devienne, a Paris flutist and bassoonist of the

late 1700s. Devienne's Concerto No. 4 required some sleuthing by the orchestra's music librarian, Jason Stephens.

Q: What did you like about the bassoon as you got to know it?

A: I always loved the sound. I loved the warmth of the low

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Jensen has a passion for both teaching and performing

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range. The bassoon can do so much, as people will discover in the Devienne concerto. There's everything from humor and virtuosity to soulfulness and beautiful melodies.

Of course, I love the "clown of the orchestra" characters, like in (Paul Dukas') "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," and the bouncy qualities the bassoon can get compared to other instruments. But I also love the fact that we can play gorgeous melodies such as the solo from (Maurice Ravel's) "Bolero."

Q: When did you start to get serious about it?

A: I never had private lessons until the ninth grade. I had heard that playing in a youth orchestra was important for the growth of a young musician. So I auditioned for the Greater Hartford Youth Orchestra, very naively playing a little etude from my method book. I thought I'd play this pretty little tune for the conductor.

He said, "You're not quite up to snuff. We're playing Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. But I need a bassoonist, so I'm going to give you a chance." So I got a

teacher and worked so hard to be able to play Tchaikovsky. A few months later, I went through the rehearsals, just completely lost. But that was enough to make me decide, "I really want to do this, and I'm willing to work hard for it."

Q: When did you start to feel like you had more of a grip?

A: I don't know that we as musicians ever feel that we have a total grip. (Laughs.) I continued to work really hard throughout high school, and I made the all-state orchestra in my sophomore year. I pretty much knew throughout

high school that I wanted to major in music in college and pursue a career of teaching and performing. Both of those were passions for me.

Q: What's rewarding about the double career?

A: I often feel like I have the best job in the world. I love working with my students. They're so inspiring. There's a different set every year, and it's so cool to figure out the individual personality of each student and what motivates them. I'm excited to go to work every day and teach these vital young people. And

it allows me the flexibility to run off to Houston a few times a year and play in the incredibly inspiring River Oaks Chamber Orchestra.

Q: How did you find the Devienne concerto?

A: I knew this was going to be a French concert, so I wanted to look for something French. Though there is some great 20th-century repertoire, there was none of it I was really passionate about. So I looked further. I had played sonatas by Devienne, and on YouTube I found a performance of the Fourth Concerto. I was

drawn to the playfulness of the first and third movements and the soulfulness of the second.

We started searching for the sheet music, and there was nothing. Jason started to snoop around and ask his librarian friends around the country and the world. At the University of Iowa, he located the orchestra parts on microfilm. From those parts he put together a full score, and he's going to make it available for sale. I think the bassoon world is going to be excited to see this charming piece in our repertoire.

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