

The Pro Musician

Winter 2017-2018

Promoting Musical Excellence

Pro Musica supports the College of Musical Arts by inviting the participation of alumni, friends, parents and the Bowling Green community in a wide variety of musical events and by providing financial support for music students.

Charles Saenz

2017 Pro Musica Faculty/Staff Award for Exceptional Service to Students



Photo by Michiko Saiki.
Courtesy of Beauport Classical.

Reading the letters nominating **Charles Saenz** for Pro Musica's Outstanding Faculty Award, you can hear echoes of what the professor of trumpet learned from his father.

Saenz' father, Ralph, started his son on trumpet in fourth grade, a year earlier than usual. "What I remember from him was we focused a lot on fundamentals of trumpet playing," Professor Saenz said recently.

Graduate student Edmund Gunther wrote in his letter of nomination: "Professor Saenz has started a Trumpet Warm-Up and Fundamentals class every morning at 8 a.m. This class, which is led by either Saenz or a teaching assistant, is in my opinion the most important hour of the day for the trumpet studio. Whether I am leading the class or in attendance, I learn something new every time and it makes me a better musician."

Saenz studied with his father all the way through high school. While such an arrangement is often a recipe for failure, in this instance it worked. "He was very good at giving me space and trying to bring in a variety of learning experiences," Saenz said.

From a young age, Ralph Saenz encouraged his son to be flexible. Saenz started working as a professional in Tex Mex and dance bands when he was 12. He joined his father in an area big band, playing fourth trumpet and learning the swing band repertoire. If his father played lead in the pit for a musical, his son was playing third.

As a result, Saenz says he's comfortable playing a recital or in a jazz quartet, or with a trumpet section in a symphony, an opera orchestra or a big band, whether lead or solo.

Students in the trumpet studio are called on to fill roles in the Falcon Marching Band, the Bowling Green Philharmonia, the wind ensembles, chamber ensembles including the Graduate Brass Quintet, and jazz bands, large and small.

"I learned from a very young age to be flexible," he said. "I tell my student the modern day trumpet player has to be flexible." Players have their own strengths and specialties "but it's very valuable to be willing to stretch more than most musicians are. Those are things I try to instill in my students if they want to forge a career in music."

Student Enrico Solito said Saenz gives each student personal attention, and helps them land jobs and auditions. Saenz knows Solito is interested in military bands, so he makes sure he's aware whenever an audition notice is posted.

Saenz actually planned to follow his father's footsteps and become a band director. Then in 1994 when he was a junior at New Mexico State University, Saenz played Charles Chaynes' *Concerto for*

Trumpet in the International Trumpet Guild Solo Competition. He came away with first prize and a dream.

Saenz' winning performance in the college competition set the trajectory for his career. After winning, he realized he wanted to be a performer and college professor. That meant putting "blinders on," and concentrating on performance and committing to getting a graduate degree. "You start seeing little benchmarks along the way. It kind of propelled my career in a direction that led here."

Saenz has been a professor of trumpet at Bowling Green State University for 16 years. During that time he's remained an active performer. He's played with the Toledo Jazz Orchestra, the Toledo Symphony and Michigan Opera Theater. For the past six years, he's been a member of the Tower Brass Quintet, an ensemble that draws on his mastery of multiple styles.

But he still comes back to the Chaynes' *Concerto*. It serves as the centerpiece for his first CD, *Eloquentia*, which was released in December 2015, by Beauport Classical. The concerto, Saenz said, has been "a signature piece" that he has been studying and performing for more than 20 years. "I'll put it away for a few years and then bring it back and perform it when I'm at a different point in my playing." He'll find some things easier, and other aspects just as difficult. "It really challenges, in different ways, my physical abilities on the instrument," he said. "But along with that it's very challenging harmonically. His language is one that takes time to understand."

In recording the CD he kept his students in mind. Whether planning a recital or a CD "I play pieces that students may want to perform in the next semester or so," he said. "I would hope some of my students who have listened to the CD might say 'I'm really interested in those pieces.'"

The recording of the Chaynes *Concerto* with piano, played by his frequent collaborator and BGSU colleague Dr. Solungga Liu, serves a pedagogical purpose as well as an artistic one. Students, Saenz said, study and perform the piece with piano, not full orchestra. They will ask Saenz if a recording exists with that instrumentation. Now he can direct them to *Eloquentia*.

Ensconed at BGSU, Saenz is seeing his career come full circle. In fall 2015, one of his graduate students, Marcus Flores, won the International Trumpet Guild Solo Competition. Jonathan Britt was a finalist in 2016 and Bryn Powell was a finalist in 2017.

Saenz recalls that competition "was very important for me because it exposed me to a larger community within the trumpet world. I felt it was very important helping shape my career."

Bernice Schwartz, a fellow member of the Tower Brass and an adjunct instructor in music education, said, having one student perform so well at that level, is notable. To have such sustained success is a tribute to Saenz' dedication as a teacher.

In her nomination she wrote: "During his time here, I have watched as the trumpet studio has grown in quantity and quality. Each year, more and more trumpet students, both undergraduate and graduate level are drawn to BGSU because of the reputation Charles has achieved.

He is extremely attentive to every student. He truly believes that every student can succeed and he works hard to find the strength of each student and then build on that strength so the student becomes more confident. As a result, when one sees his students perform, they are all about the music making, with nerves of steel."

— David Dupont

(David Dupont is a founder of *BG Independent News*. His frequent writing on the arts at BGSU and beyond can be read at bgindependentmedia.org)

Student Essays



Hannah Greer in the stands between performances at Lucas Oil Stadium. You can see in the background the students of Broken Arrow High School preparing to take the field.

Hannah Greer

Bands of America National Championship Competition
Indianapolis
November 11, 2017

The Bands of America Grand National Championship was held in Lucas Oil Stadium, which is the stadium that also hosts the Drum Corps International Competition and is the only stadium in the world that was built with acoustics in mind. It is a huge venue, probably the finest stadium any of the performing high schools had ever been in, and the audience was so large that Lucas Oil Stadium was half-filled!

While attending this competition I got to briefly talk to Greg Bimm, the band director at Marian Catholic High School from Chicago. Marian Catholic was one of the competing bands and Bimm is one of my idols in the profession. It was valuable for me to talk to him about his students and the progress they've made this year not only because I got to hear new pedagogical approaches but also because it was so cool to see that even Greg Bimm, one of the best educators in the country, is just a normal teacher trying to educate his kids. It made me feel like the level of greatness he has achieved in his career isn't so inaccessible for me.

Marian Catholic's show was centered around the theme of "Nature vs. Machine" and so their song selection featured *The Great Locomotive Chase* by Robert W Smith and a piece called *Liminal* by John Mackey. Both pieces were originally written for symphonic band, but were specifically arranged for this ensemble. Union High School in Oklahoma had a show centered around anger with the "Dies Irae" from the Verdi *Requiem* as one of its prominently featured arrangements. There were 10 other high schools performing and it was great to see the type of repertoire each band program picked (often from large orchestral works or operas) and how these pieces were connected to separate storylines.

BOA Grand Nationals is such a wonderful event for career connections and professional development because you literally have the best band programs and educators in the country all in one place, performing at such a high level and pushing each other to reach the next level. The audience is made up of other educators and musicians as well, so it was a wonderful way for me to meet and connect with music educators who have the same interests, passions and goals as I do. Not only did I get to engage in discussion that opened my scope of what is possible for a high school marching band, but I also got to experience via the performances of these bands just how advanced our students can be if we can equip them with the right instruction and information. I can say without a doubt that this was a life-changing experience for me and I am so thankful to Pro Musica for sponsoring my trip to this competition.

Other News

Douglas Wayland Chamber Music Competition

The 11th annual **Douglas Wayland Chamber Music Competition** on March 24–25, 2018 in Bryan Recital Hall.

Pro Musica provided the event's reception in the Kennedy Green Room following the finals. The competition honors Wayland's love of chamber music and his contribution to the college.

Each year, the competition costs approximately \$5,000. An endowment has been established for the annual event.

If interested in contributing to this cause, please contact Kristina Devine at (419) 372-9213 or kmdevin@bgsu.edu.

Student Performances at the Way and the Wood County Public Libraries

Watch for information on the spring chamber

music concerts at both the Wood County Public Library in Bowling Green and the Way Library in Perrysburg.

Each concert will feature CMA students who received Pro Musica Travel Grants this past year.