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## **Keith Winking – *The Long Road to the Chicago Symphony: An Interview with Craig Morris* (Mar 02/7)**

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# The Long Road to the Chicago Symphony: An Interview with Craig Morris

BY KEITH WINKING

For a number of years, there has been active speculation in the trumpet world. Who will fill the shoes of the legendary Adolph Herseth when his unprecedented career as principal trumpet of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra ends? This speculation was finally put to rest this past February. Craig Morris was appointed as the new principal trumpet of the CSO.

While Morris might be considered the Tiger Woods of the trumpet world; he has won his last four auditions (Chicago-two different positions, San Francisco, and Boston); his path was not easy, smooth, or straight. His eventual successes exemplify an artist's determination and perseverance.

The philosopher Joseph Campbell liked to quote this bit of advice given to a young Native American at the time of his initiation to manhood: "As you go the way of life, you will see a great chasm. Jump. It is not as wide as you think." Craig Morris' journey should serve as an inspiration to all musicians.

**CM:** I was born July 8, 1968 in Odessa, Texas. My father (Cecil) was a band director and taught in Denver City near Odessa. When I was three we moved to Bonham, Texas, northeast of Dallas. We stayed there until the summer of 1974 when I turned six, at which time we moved to San Antonio, where I lived until I went off to college.

**KW:** In what grade and on what instrument did you start playing?

**CM:** I started playing halfway through fifth grade. I was ten years old. I started on cornet. My brother was

eight years older. He'd been taking lessons a long time and I would periodically go to a lesson with him. I wouldn't play, but I would go along so I didn't just sit at home alone. I would usually just look around the music store while he took a lesson. My dad called me in one day and said, "Craig, you're going to go to a trumpet lesson with Kevin tomorrow." I said, "Okay, that's fine." "No, no, you don't understand," he said, "You're going to go **play** a trumpet lesson."

**KW:** This was when you were in fifth grade?

**CM:** Yes. I said, "But Dad, I don't know how to play the trumpet," at which point he said, "That's **why** you're going to go take a lesson. You can learn to play so you can see if you like it." By starting a little early, it gave me a head start going into beginning band. Luckily, my middle school band program was great. Larry Schmidt, the band director, could really work miracles with the kids.

**KW:** Larry is still teaching and playing in San Antonio.

**CM:** Yes. He's a good trumpet player, a great band director, and a fine educator. He was so good to work with; he wasn't obsessed with placing well at competitions like some band directors. He

didn't pick a medium difficulty program and then polish it until it was perfect. His philosophy was to expose his kids to everything that he possibly could and really challenge them. We played *Lincolnshire Posy*, both Holst *Suites* for band, challenging things for a junior high band. Our performances were not exactly models for what the composer imagined, but nonetheless we played them and survived.

**KW:** It obviously exposed you to great music.



Photo courtesy of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

**CM:** We were playing this great stuff. The tunes we took to contest were like that. I can't remember what they were, but they were difficult. We'd take our best stab at it. Larry was so great about all that, exposing you to things. His whole system was very good, very conducive to learning.

**KW:** Was Larry your trumpet teacher, too?

**CM:** Not at first. I later studied with him for just one year. My first teacher, and the person I studied with until I left for college, was John Goodwin, a former lead trumpeter with the Airmen of Note. My brother had taken lessons from him and my dad had known him from his teaching in the area. I remember waiting outside and hearing him warm up. He would play scales, gradually expanding the range until he could play a 3-octave scale up to double C and back. It was very impressive to hear. He just had great command of the instrument.

I remember he would always play things for me first. "I want you to play this," and then he'd play it through. Then he would say, "Now you try it," and I'd play it and it would be fine. Eventually he stopped doing that. So one time at a lesson I said, "Why don't you play it for me, so I can hear what it sounds like?" He said, "No, if I play it first I know you're going to play it right. I want to see if you can play it without me playing it first, to see that you're actually reading the music." Of course, it was much more difficult for me when I didn't have his model to follow, but it taught me a valuable lesson. He was a good guy and a good influence.

There was one other important event that happened halfway through my sixth grade year that I should mention. When I first started playing, I could get around the instrument pretty well for my age, but I **sounded** terrible. I had the worst sound in the world. It sounded like you just took a beach towel and stuffed it up my bell. I'd been studying with Mr. Goodwin for about a year and my dad came home one day and heard me in there practicing. It was a week away from solo and ensemble contest. I guess that was finally the thing that set him off, hearing me in there playing the *Cavalier* — however it goes — getting all the right notes, but just sounding awful. Dad opened the door to the music room and said, "No son of mine is going to contest sounding like that. Get in here!" He said this with a wry smile and a twinkle in his eye, but I knew he was serious. We went into the living room, and he started working with me just trying to get me to open up and start making a warmer, richer sound. Within 15 minutes, he had transformed my whole approach to making a sound on the trumpet. Of course, it was very uncomfortable. My range and endurance were instantly cut down. For the first time, however, I really liked the quality of my

sound. I never liked practicing much before that, because I would hate hearing it. Afterward I thought, this is actually nice to listen to. So I worked hard that week to try to get to the point where I could play this solo, and managed to get through it fine. I remember the first thing on my comment sheet from the judge, "Great sound!" That meant a lot to me.

**KW:** In high school, what kind of playing did you do outside of your regular school groups? Didn't you play in a drum corps?

**CM:** Actually, when I was in the summer between my seventh and eighth grade year, my brother marched in the Crossmen Drum and Bugle Corps in Westchester, Pennsylvania, and I joined him for half that summer. I marched a little bit, but most of the time I did equipment for the color guard. I had just turned 13 and I was awkward trying to march. A funny thing happened that summer. In DCI every year they have an Individual's Competition and my brother, who has had an enormous influence on me said, "You know, you should enter this Individual's Competition at DCI." I said, "Okay. What should I play?" He said, "Well, you know the first movement of the Haydn, so play that."

It was funny because back then I hadn't really started growing yet; I was short for my age. I was probably 4 foot 9 or something. I had this uniform just



Morris and Herseth, Chicago, 1998

draped over me. They didn't have them that small. I walked in there looking like a little boy wearing his daddy's clothes. I played and ended up placing second, much to the dismay of some of the great soloists that had played that day. Of course they could all play circles around me, but I was prepared to go in there and play, and didn't have to worry about playing anything on the field. It let me know that I could be successful at this if I put my mind to it.

Another example of my brother's influence is when



he had gone off to school my seventh grade year and I was talking to him on the phone. It was September and solo ensemble contest was in February. He said, "You should start thinking about what solo you want to play." I asked, "What do you think I should play?" He said, "You should play something with some double-tonguing in it." I said, "What's double-tonguing?" He explained it to me, then said, "You know what, you should play the *Concert Etude*."



L to R: Morris, Hagstrom, Herseth (Chicago, 1998)

**KW:** In seventh grade?

**CM:** I got the music out and started practicing it. Eventually I was brave enough to take it into my lesson. I also got help from Larry Schmidt, and of course, from my brother – after all, he was the one who had gotten me into it in the first place. So I worked it up for contest in seventh grade and it went well. After that, I started learning the Haydn.

The next fall my brother and I went through the same routine about what I should work up next. This time he said, "You should play a solo with triple-tonguing in it." "Okay. What's triple tonguing?" He explained it to me. He said, "You know what you should play?" "No, what?" I asked. "You should play the *Carnival of Venice*." "All right. What's that?" With that, I was off to work on my next project. I knew it was hard, because it took me forever to work it out - but I didn't know that you weren't supposed to be doing that in eighth grade!

In eighth grade, I began studying privately with Larry Schmidt, while continuing my studies with Mr. Goodwin. Larry was a great motivator; he knew me so well by that point. I brought in the *Carnival of Venice* to get his thoughts on it. After I played a little bit he said, "No, you're not going to play that this year for contest. That's too hard for you. You can't do that." I didn't like being told that I couldn't do something. So I practiced it and worked with Mr. Goodwin on it for about the next four months. Then a month before contest, I brought it back to Mr. Schmidt and said, "You know, I've been working on this a little bit and I really think I can play it. Tell me what you think." So I played it through and he said, "Well, I guess that'll be okay." Of course, he told me years later that, knowing me, all he needed to do was tell me that I couldn't do it, and that would give me the motivation I needed to pull it off. It was very wise, very insightful. He is brilliant at reading students. I was lucky to have him as my Band Director/Teacher.

**KW:** Did you march drum corps in high school?

**CM:** Yes. The summer between my ninth and tenth grade year, I marched with the Crossmen.

**KW:** I remember commenting on your strong chops some time back and recall you telling me drum corps did that for you.

**CM:** Absolutely. We had these hellacious days when we'd rehearse 10-12 hours a day, sometimes more. Not all of it was playing, but it still made for some grueling days. I remember one year the week before finals, we'd get up at 7, have an hour to shower and eat breakfast, then we'd start rehearsal at 8. We'd rehearse from 8 to noon and then have an hour for lunch, come back from 1 to 4, and then have some down time. We'd have dinner and relax a little bit, and then we'd go back out and rehearse from 7 pm to midnight. They were long days. We were doing a lot of playing but they really tried to take care of the players. We would always warm up as a group and then warm down as a group after rehearsals. It was very demanding, but it forced you to figure out how to get strong enough to survive.

**KW:** So you marched for just one year?

**CM:** I was involved for two years, but marched one year full time.

**KW:** Did you participate in all-state groups in high school?

**CM:** Yes, and it was a nice thing to be able to do. My sophomore year I got into the all-state band. My junior year I was in the orchestra, a great orchestra. We did the *Pines of Rome* and the Dvorak *Carnival Overture*. My senior year I played in the jazz band. All three were great experiences.

**KW:** Did you play in a variety of groups in your high school?

**CM:** I played lead in the jazz band. We didn't have much of an orchestra, but I would play if they needed winds. I played in various honor bands and orchestras.

I still have friends from those groups that I see periodically.

**KW:** Tell me how you decided to go into performance and not music education. Did you have a defining moment where you knew you wanted to be a professional musician?

**CM:** I wish I knew what program it was, but when I was in about seventh grade, I saw a TV program on PBS. The show was about studio musicians. They would show up for work with their bag full of instruments, and just play whatever was on the stand. They talked about what the life was like and it sounded very intriguing. I thought, "You know, that sounds fun!" You can just show up and play your horn. They mentioned that they made good money and it just seemed to me like a great way to make a living. That planted a seed. For the first time, I realized that I could actually play my horn and make a good living. I didn't really know about the professional orchestra world until later. Both of my parents sang barbershop, and I feel like I probably heard every band piece ever written, but I really wasn't familiar with the orchestral repertoire. I didn't really know what the possibilities were for doing different careers in music at that point. As I got older, I became a big fan of Maurice André and thought, "Hey, maybe I can be a soloist, that'd be great." I was pretty naïve, but at least I knew that I wanted to have a career in performance.

So I decided toward the end of my high school career that I wanted to major in music performance. My dad wanted me to get a music education degree. He thought that it would be good to have a safety net. Everyone was supportive, but everyone was thinking conservatively. No one wanted to see me living in a cardboard box in New York City. "Don't do perfor-

mance. Do something else and then try to make it work," they'd say. I knew that for me that just wasn't the right option. Performance can be such a rocky road at times. I knew if I had a safety net, I'd use it. As long as I didn't have a safety net, I had to stay on the wire. That's what kept me going at some really tough times later in my career; I didn't have an easy out. There would have been plenty of times here in Texas, with a music education degree, if someone said, "Oh, we've got this great band director job over in wherever," I would have thought, "Okay, I could do that, I could buy a house and have a comfortable life." There's nothing wrong with that, but that's not what I wanted to do. I have all the respect in the world, obviously, for band directors but I never wanted to do that. I wanted to be a player. I didn't feel like it was fair to the students to have somebody in there who was just doing a job and passing time while he was trying to make his performance career work. Teaching is too important to take lightly!

**KW:** I've had Marvin Stamm as a guest on several occasions and have heard him preach that exact message. He always tells kids that if they don't really want to teach, then do the world a favor and don't, because as a teacher you have too big of an impact on students' lives. There are already too many uncommitted teachers out there, so please do something else.

**CM:** I remember that now. He was one of the ones that really helped me shape that. My dad, all along through my performance career said, "You know, you should stay an extra year and go ahead and get your music education certification." I was fighting that. It just didn't seem right. Then Marvin came to UT (The University of Texas at Austin) and said that you have to be committed to teaching. Your students have to be



Chicago Symphony fourth trumpets. L to R: Charles Geyer, Tim Kent, Craig Morris, John Hagstrom, William Scarlett

your first priority. That's exactly right. Teaching is not a safety net. I just couldn't quite put it into words but Stamm hit the nail on the head!

**KW:** When you finished high school how did you choose a university?

**CM:** I was a young Texas boy so I was looking at where in Texas I could go to school. For some reason – it's hard for me to look back now and remember - - I didn't consider going to Eastman or Juilliard, Northwestern or Michigan, or any of the big schools. I knew Mr. Crisara and The University of Texas from their band camps and other various events, but it was hard to be excited about coming to study with him because he was honest. I was a high school kid who was used to being told how great I was. I'd go in to take a lesson with him, and he'd just call it as it was; I was good for my age, but I had a long way to go. One of the first lessons with him, I was playing a triple tongue passage in one of the Herbert L. Clarke solos and he said, "Well, Craig, it doesn't sound like you're getting all the notes to speak well. Why don't you try it again slowly? Just take it down about half tempo." So I did it single tongued. "Okay, now do it a little faster, but do it triple tongued." "I can't triple tongue that speed," I said. "Well, that's going to be a problem. Isn't that right? That means you really don't have very good control of your triple tonguing right now. You need to take it and slow it down. You should have no gap between your single tonguing and your multiple tonguing." At the time, I didn't want to hear that, but of course, he was right. I didn't have good control of my triple tonguing. I could triple tongue fast, but I couldn't do it cleanly and precisely at various speeds; it was either on or off. He made me face something that I didn't necessarily want to face. It wasn't fun studying with him at that point.

I knew something about Crisara's career in New York, but not a lot. It wasn't until after I got there that I realized how lucky I was to be in a place like that with him and, of course, the whole studio. I don't think I could've chosen a better place to go to school. It was such a good environment. Crisara would address things with a gentle firmness, "Okay, well, this is a little bit of a problem," and then he'd iron that out. He was relentless. He wouldn't let you get by with any weaknesses anywhere. There were no excuses, no, "Well, you can't really do that, but that's okay, you don't really have to do that very often anyway." He

wouldn't tolerate it, because he knew that if I was going to be a professional performer, it wasn't going to be tolerated there either. It was very fortunate that I ended up going to UT to study with him.

**KW:** His approach is good preparation for the real performing world. It has to be right the first time. Most young people don't think about that. When I first came to study with him as a graduate student, he aired all my dirty laundry. I realized that I needed this. At an earlier age, however, I might not have been mature enough to deal with it.

**CM:** It was hard. I remember at times being angry and upset coming out of lessons. He was never mean; he was just honest. He would just look and say, "Well, Craig, you know, that's just not very good now. You can do better. Work on it some more and bring it back next week." He forced me to come to terms with my own ego. I had this image of myself as a hot young trumpet player.

What he saw was a young trumpet player that had some issues to work out. His attitude was that you'd better get to work, because somebody else is working just as hard if not harder.

**KW:** What did you play in lessons with Mr. Crisara?

**CM:** Mostly etudes: Arban, Brandt, Balay, Bitsch, Chavanne, and so forth. I spent a lot of time on the solo repertoire. He wanted to teach me to get around the horn. Lay that foundation, and then simply refine it for whatever specific area you wanted to go into. There were some excerpts, of course, but they made up a very small percent of the material.



Craig Morris and Arnold Jacobs, Chicago, 1998

Crisara's whole approach was music-based. He spent some time on technical concerns, but mostly he just wanted you to think musically and sing through the instrument. The less you were involved in the mechanical process, the better. That is one of the main things I have told my students, "Stay on the bell side of the horn. Just stay up there in front of the horn." That definitely comes from my time with him.

**KW:** When did Crisara begin working on the smaller horns with you?

**CM:** I started playing C right away. I played something on C on every recital or jury. I played piccolo trumpet early as well. I was exposed to a lot right away, and then tried to figure out how to make it work. It was never presented as anything difficult. It definitely is different, but you just learn what you need to do to get around this new instrument. Again, I was told to stay on the bell side, and listen for the right sound.

**KW:** You mentioned earlier about the environment



in school. I don't recall any animosity or jealousy at all since everybody got along so well. Did you feel like the atmosphere was conducive to your musical development?

**CM:** It was a great place to be because of the people in the studio. Everyone brought his/her unique set of experiences and wisdom. Everyone supported each other. I remember Jim Recktenwald (Louisville Symphony) who lived, slept, and ate trumpet. You could talk to Jim for five minutes and find out things you never even knew existed about literature, soloists, anything. I think I discovered the Honegger *Intrada* and Håkan Hardenberger all through Jim. I remember him coming to a lesson with this album one day and I asked about this young trumpet soloist (Hardenberger) and he encouraged me to listen. It's amazing how much you can learn outside of lessons in that kind of environment. We were very fortunate.

**KW:** What happened after you graduated from UT?

**CM:** I went off to the San Francisco Conservatory to start graduate work. I studied with Glenn Fischthal, the principal trumpet in San Francisco. I was attracted by his playing, and wanted to incorporate some of the things he did into my own playing. I learned a lot out there. It was a very different environment. I was exposed to a lot of things – especially in the area of orchestral playing. Fischthal was a great help with excerpts.

**KW:** Is this when you started working on orchestral excerpts?

**CM:** I did some with Mr. Crisara, but San Francisco was the first time I started studying excerpts seriously.

**KW:** What year did you graduate from San Francisco?

**CM:** I graduated in 1991 and came back to Austin where I freelanced in the area and taught lessons.

**KW:** Had you taken any auditions at this point?

**CM:** My first audition was in 1991 for the Colorado Symphony in Denver. I advanced there playing everything on B-flat. I also took an audition for third in the San Francisco Opera since I could walk over from my house. I didn't really have a chance at that point in my career, but I went and took it for the experience. Then I moved back to Austin and money was just a huge problem. It was very tight. I made almost nothing and didn't get to take another audition for over a year and a half. It was actually two years from the San

Francisco Opera audition until my next audition in 1993. I just couldn't afford the cost.

At that point, Troy Rowley (UT classmate) had gotten into Rice and he had been studying with Jim Wilt (Associate Principal, Houston Symphony). Troy was wrapping up a year at Rice and suggested I take some lessons with Wilt. He was a young guy (31) at the time, and I thought, "what's he got to teach me?" I was just young and ignorant. I had all the answers. So I went and took this New World Symphony audition and I noticed that Rowley seemed prepared and focused. He ended up getting the job. Rowley didn't give me a second look. Not long after that, Troy was over at my house and I was playing for him. It was so strange because I would play something, and I'd think, "Yeah, that was pretty good." Then he would say, "You know, that sounds good. Don't take this wrong, but it seems like you're rushing a little bit here." After everything I played, he would, in the nicest way, say, "Well ..." and it just hit me like an oncoming train. I realized that I wasn't listening for the right things. It was very appar-



Members of the San Francisco Symphony brass, New Year's Eve, 1999.  
L to R: Glenn Fischthal, Craig Morris, John Zirbel, Paul Welcomer, John Engelkes

ent that Rowley was listening, not to mention playing, on a different level. After that I went to one more audition and played terribly. When I returned home, my first call was to Jim Wilt. "When can I come for a lesson?" I asked.

I remember my first lesson with Jim very well. The first thing I played was *Petroushka*. I thought I played it very well. He paused for a moment, then said, "Some good things. One thing that's really important in this excerpt is keeping good time. Right now, the 16ths are running a bit." He's telling me this and I couldn't believe it. I didn't think there was any problem, yet he had this laundry list of things to work on. Then he played it for me and I thought, "Oh, okay." Luckily, I was taping all these lessons, because I'd finish playing and think, "What's this guy listening to?" I listened to the tape in the car on my way home and heard what he was trying to point out to me. He was listening to

exactly what was there. It was a great experience. It opened my ears, because, at that time, I wasn't studying with anyone. I was performing, but not in a highly critical environment. The year I spent with Wilt taught me what it takes to play in an orchestra; what it takes to win an audition, all the subtleties of getting excerpts to a certain level. I'd drive to Houston and every time he'd take two or three hours with me. We'd sit down and play through all kinds of stuff. After a year or so, he went to New York. The next fall I won my first job as principal in Sacramento. That was in September of 1994. Unfortunately, after two seasons the orchestra went bankrupt, but I had some great times there and learned a lot.

**KW:** Did you teach at all while you were in Sacramento?

**CM:** The first year I didn't teach at all. Actually, I didn't teach while I was in the symphony. After the bankruptcy, I started teaching part time at two local colleges. So between that and the freelancing I did in San Francisco I was able to survive. After a year, I started playing with the Dallas Brass, and after doing that for five months, I won the fourth in Chicago. That was February of 1998.

**KW:** Didn't you also do a New York audition during this time?

**CM:** I did. I was a finalist for one of their many auditions for fourth. That was very important for me because it was my first real success in an audition for a major symphony.

**KW:** After winning the fourth position in Chicago you then auditioned two weeks later in San Francisco, right?

**CM:** Yes. I was living out there and I was actually playing with San Francisco that week. We were doing Mahler's *Sixth Symphony*. I had been planning all along to take the audition, but after I won the Chicago job, I didn't really want to take the San Francisco audition. I was excited to be going to Chicago. However, it was an audition with no pressure. You know, what's there to lose? If you don't get the job, you go play with the Chicago Symphony. I finally decided to take the audition and it went well. I wasn't as prepared as I could have been, but I was successful because I was relaxed. My audition was far from perfect, but I learned that you don't have to play perfectly to win. You have to play musically with a great sound and be exciting. You do have to play well, but a simple mistake or two is not going to cost you the job. I found myself in the unbelievable position of having two very fine jobs from which to choose. I went to Chicago and finished out the season while I decided what I was going to do.

**KW:** Didn't Herseth and others in Chicago encourage you to go to San Francisco?

**CM:** Yes, Herseth, Dale Clevenger, and Gail Williams all told me at different times it would be good. I think Charlie Vernon alluded to it, "You know, if you eventually want to play principal, whether its

here or anywhere else, you should go to San Francisco."

**KW:** The job in San Francisco was associate principal?

**CM:** Yes. When there were three trumpets and the principal was playing, I was off. When four trumpets played including the principal, I played third. The rest of the time I would play first or assist the principal. I was getting a lot of experience, playing a lot of repertoire.

**KW:** Didn't you audition for fourth in Boston and make the finals for principal in Chicago the same year?

**CM:** No, they actually were in different years. I won the Boston job in September of 2000. The first audition for principal trumpet in the CSO was in February of 1999. I couldn't play the prelims for the first Chicago principal audition because San Francisco was on a European tour during that time. So I called them ahead of time and said, "You know I'd love to be able to come, but I can't play the prelims." I figured I wouldn't be able to attend. In the middle of the European tour, about two and a half weeks before the audition, I received an invitation to the finals.

By the time I got back from tour, I had about ten days to get ready for the audition. I started cramming things together as best I could, but I was concerned about it on a number of levels. I wanted to play well and be competitive. After all, these guys were my former colleagues. There is no screen to hide behind in the pre-final round of the audition. I played well. At the end of the day, though, my lack of preparation came back to haunt me. I wasn't able to put together the kind of last round that I wanted to, or that is required for a position of this stature. Even so, I got within one vote of getting the job. That's when I started thinking that this position might be a real possibility for me because I knew I could play better than I did, and they were impressed with what they were hearing already.

**KW:** So you came back to audition for the same position in January of 2001. Were you able to skip the prelims again?

**CM:** No. I started right from the beginning, and the preliminary round in Chicago was one of the toughest I've ever had to play. Since I had come so close at the first audition, I felt that the people in the orchestra really expected me to advance. I knew I would be seeing everyone afterward and that if I didn't advance it would be awkward. Those things combined to make the prelim round the most difficult psychologically.

**KW:** Tell me about the finals.

**CM:** There were two people invited to play at pre-finals. One of them advanced to the final. This left nine for the finals: six that advanced from the prelims, two members of the orchestra and one from the pre-final. The finals were held with the screen up because of the internal candidates. From there, they cut it down to two, which was the solo trumpet from the Hamburg



Radio Orchestra and me. The screen came down and he went first. I came out on stage and Barenboim was sitting on stage, as though we were going to play duets. He presented everything as a waiter would present a meal. He said “We have a little bit of everything for you. We have a full-course meal planned. We’re going to start with a little appetizer and move on to the main entrée and then we’ll have a little dessert. Our appetizer is going to be a little Beethoven 3.” Off we went. The first three things we played were sight-reading.

**KW:** Sight-reading meaning they weren’t on the list.

**CM:** Exactly. So he conducted me through Beethoven 3, Beethoven 5, and Siegfried’s “Funeral March” from *Götterdämmerung*, none of which was on the list. After that we did the Post Horn Solo and the Chorale from Mahler 3, *Capriccio Italien*, *Petroushka* (not on the list), and finished with *Brandenburg 2*. As I mentioned he had presented the audition like a meal: each excerpt was a particular course. When we got to *Brandenburg*, he said, “Now how about a little dessert?” I looked at what he had put on the stand, then looked at him, and smiled, “Doesn’t look like a very sweet dessert!” We both laughed, and I jumped in and played. The situation was remarkably relaxed considering what was at stake. That made it very pleasant, and I was pleased with the way I played.

Honestly, I think the best feeling I had through the whole process was when I walked off the stage and thought, yeah, I came and did exactly what I wanted to do. There might have been a little thing here or there, but I couldn’t have expected myself to play any better. If I could have drawn up a script, I might well have drawn up that audition. It was such a great feeling, because ever since I had walked off that stage two years before, I had been gearing up to come back and do it again. You work and work to polish everything up and get it in shape; you’re trying to keep the whole list right on your fingertips. In the end, it all came together just as I had hoped. I had done everything I could. Now, the decision was in their hands. Afterward they called us both into Barenboim’s studio. He said, “You know, you both played very well, really, very, very well. In the end, I can only pick one. So I’ve decided to offer the job to Craig.”

**KW:** He said this in front of both of you?

**CM:** Yes, he announced the decision. Then he looked immediately at the other guy and said, “You played very well, really. You did so many nice things. Such beautiful playing and you will have a very fine career, very fine. Then he said, “There were two reasons you didn’t win the audition today: “One, we felt like your sound could be bigger, a little broader for this orchestra and this hall. Two, you had very good competition.” That, obviously, was a very flattering thing for me to hear. He said, “It’s that simple. Those are the two reasons.” I just stood there in shock.

**KW:** What do you do to stay in shape and prepare for auditions?

**CM:** Most of my career I have been in an “audition mode,” always preparing for something other than my current job, keeping a pretty steady stream of excerpts going. I have a few that are ready to go at anytime. When there isn’t an audition pending, I spend more time on etudes, exercises, and solos, but 2-3 months before an audition I focus

on the excerpts on the list. I always look at it like I am selling a product to the orchestra, and to do that well, I think every detail needs to be addressed. If not, they’ll buy from someone else. It is always important to balance your practice on excerpts with other types of playing, but I think the focus should be on the audition material.

**KW:** During a mock orchestra audition clinic you presented for my students, I recall you talked about various things you did to take care of yourself physically prior to an audition, such as watching your diet and eliminating caffeine. What made you start thinking about these issues?

**CM:** I wanted to make myself as comfortable as possible in this intrinsically uncomfortable environment. It’s never easy laying it on the line at auditions. Having caffeine in your system only makes things worse. Caffeine dries you out and makes you jittery. I realized this and simply decided to eliminate it a couple of days before an audition. It won’t win an audition, but it just might keep you from losing it!

**KW:** You said something earlier about knowing that you wanted the CSO job. You know **THAT** job is the trumpet job everybody’s been talking about for many years. I went to my first ITG conference at the University of Illinois in the 1970s and recall people talking then about Herseth’s successor. I’m sure that



Craig Morris and Glenn Fischthal in London prior to performing at the “Proms” in Royal Albert Hall

after you won you thought about the fact that you just won a position that trumpet players have been talking about for decades.

**CM:** It's amazing. After I talked to Barenboim, I came out of the studio and there was, basically, the entire CSO brass section standing there welcoming me with open arms: Dale Clevenger, Charlie Vernon, Gene Pokorny, Bud Herseth, and many more. My first thought was: "What are these guys all here for? Are they here to see Barenboim?" I was definitely still in shock. It was an incredible feeling. One of the interesting things about it is how simple the whole process seemed from that perspective; you just show up and play through some excerpts, then suddenly, you're the next principal trumpet of the Chicago Symphony. Last night, Mr. Crisara said (at the Crisara retirement tribute concert) "You just go play. You blow in a tube and see what happens." Yeah, you go blow into a piece of pipe and you make sounds on it and you go downstairs and you wait about 15 minutes, and then someone comes down and says, "I'm going to give the job to you." Suddenly you're sitting in the first chair spot in the Chicago Symphony, pinching yourself. Very strange really.

**KW:** I'm sure the short time you played fourth in the section with Herseth must have helped you prepare for this audition. If you hadn't done that, your first concert with the CSO would have been a different experience. It's obviously still a big experience, so I want to ask about your first concerts these last two weeks (April 2001). How does it feel to realize you're now playing first?

**CM:** My first notes with the orchestra were the solos in *Parsifal*. It was nerve-wracking. I remember walking out on stage before the first rehearsal. On the one hand, it's just an orchestra rehearsal; you sit down in the chair and then you look at the folder and it says Chicago Symphony Orchestra, 1st Trumpet. Wow. Oh, I'm sorry – excuse me, I must have sat down in the wrong place. I remember sitting down, looking at the folder and just smiling. I felt like the luckiest guy alive. Barenboim came out and he introduced me, "I'd like everyone to welcome our new principal trumpet player," and everyone in the orchestra applauded. It was a very special moment. The next night was the first concert, and everything went very well. At the end of *Parsifal*, I received a solo bow. When I stood up, the orchestra and the audience erupted into applause. It was the warmest welcome that I could have imagined. It just hit me, welcome to Chicago.

One of the things that people ask me is "what is it like replacing Bud Herseth?" I always reply: "There is no replacing Bud. I'm just the next guy doing the job." People think that there must be a lot of pressure on me to play like Herseth, but that isn't the case. There is pressure to maintain the standards he set, but not to

do things exactly the way he did them. In that regard, there's very little pressure to fill Herseth's shoes, because he wore them off the stage!

**KW:** That's a good way of putting it. I have heard for many years that the Chicago Symphony, in general, is a high-class orchestra in terms of the way they treated people.

**CM:** Absolutely. There are so many good people here and such great musicians. It is a wonderful situation, and I'm lucky to be a part of it.

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*"There is no replacing Bud [Herseth]. I'm just the next guy doing the job."*

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*About the author:* Keith Winking is associate professor of music at Southwest Texas State University where he teaches trumpet and directs the jazz ensemble. Winking's degrees are from Quincy University (BME), Southwest Texas (MM), and The University of Texas (DMA). His teachers have included Raymond Crisara, Vincent Cichowicz, Leon Rapiet, and Don "Jake" Jacoby. Winking has presented solo and ensemble recitals and clinics throughout the United States, Canada, Sweden, Japan, Switzerland, and Russia. He is a Selmer/Bach clinician.

