

# SCHERZO

Interviews with the notable musicians & fascinating personalities of our day

with **WESLEY FERREIRA**

## STEPHEN WILLIAMSON

*Stephen Williamson is one of the most well-respected clarinetists of our day. He is the principal clarinetist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and formerly the principal clarinetist of the New York Philharmonic and Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. He sits down to answer some of my questions.*

**What's the best part about being a musician?** The undeniable commitment that we are beholden to an art form that transcends all languages, bringing enrichment to the human spirit.

**What's the hardest part about being a musician?** Our expectations and interpretations are always changing. We're always striving to improve as artists.

**What's one thing that people would be surprised to find out about you?** I'm an avid powerlifter and bodybuilder.

**Is there a musician/artist that you admire?** Glenn Gould.

**What was a dream you had when you were younger that has come true?** I wanted to become the principal clarinetist of a major symphony orchestra.

**What was a dream you had when you were younger that has not come true?** To become a priest.

**What country have you yet to visit but would love to?** Egypt.

**What's the first piece of music you remember falling in love with?** Gustav Mahler's Second Symphony.

**What's something that you've wanted to do for a long time but haven't yet?** Learn how to sail.

**What is the one common myth about your profession or field that you want to debunk?** "Once you land a job, you're set." It's actually just the beginning of your development as an artist.

**How do you wind down at the end of the day?** Spend every moment I can with my wife and my sons.

**Did you have a career fork in the road?** Having to choose where to stay (Metropolitan Opera, New York Philharmonic, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra).

**What is a typical day like for you?**

I wake up, get kids fed and off to school. Then head to rehearsal. Practice/teach students. Come home for dinner with family. Either get ready for a concert or go to the gym.

**Are you a morning practicer or an evening practicer? How early do you start/end?** I prefer to practice in the early afternoon or evening. Never more than 2 hours at a time.

**What was your most meaningful performance?** Too many to quantify. So I will say that recently I performed the Corigliano Concerto with the Eastman Wind Ensemble. My first time performing this work (it was on my 52nd birthday) and my first time back at my Alma Mater since I graduated in '91. It was a full-circle moment.



Photo credit: Todd Rosenberg Photography

**Who is your favorite composer right now?** My son, Connor. He's on Spotify and Apple Music. His stage name is "Turts" and he has a few albums so far. Electronic Alternative Dance music.

**What's your favorite clarinet gadget or piece of equipment?** James Pyne "Williamson model" mouthpiece.

**What is your favorite trait in a conductor?** "Less is more."

# CODA

If you weren't a clarinetist, which instrument would you play?  
**Trumpet.**

If you ruled the world, what's the first thing you would change?  
**End world hunger.**

If you could take back one sentence?  
**"I can't."**

If you could have personally witnessed one historical event, what would it be?

**The premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.**

If a picture paints a thousand words, how would you describe your promo picture?  
**Perseverance.**

If aliens landed in your backyard, what would you do? **I'd ask if they could help us save our planet.**

If you could be any fictional character, who would you be and why? **The Hulk - childhood hero.**

If you could have any other talent?  
**A photographic memory.**