

SCHERZO

Interviews with the notable musicians & fascinating personalities of our day

with **WESLEY FERREIRA**

JOHN BRUCE YEH

The longest-tenured clarinetist in the history of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, an enthusiastic champion of new music, and a frequent performer at festivals and on chamber music series worldwide, John Bruce Yeh sits down to answer some questions.

What's the best part about being a musician? Communicating with people.

What is your best habit, and what is your worst?
Efficiency. Laziness.

Do you have a necessary vice?
Eating lots of amazing food!

What's always in your bag?
My schedule book.

What worries you about the world? Pollution, poverty, corruption, stupid people.

What's the one thing that people would be surprised to find out about you? I switched to musical studies at Juilliard after 2 years of pre-medical studies at UCLA.

What really makes you laugh?
The Book of Mormon, the musical. Hardest I ever laughed. Other funny TV shows, Saturday Night Live, stuff like that.

What's the one thing that you think people need to hear right now? Get involved in politics. Always take a stand and hold your elected representatives accountable!

Is there a book you recommend to everyone? Stacey Abrams's *Our Time is Now*.

What TV show are you mid-binging on? "Schitt's Creek;" actually just finished watching the whole series with my family. Lots of fun!

Do you prefer coffee or tea?
Tea (different fruit herbal teas). I brew my own kombucha from them too.

What's your morning routine?
Get up, take vitamins, eat breakfast, take our dog Ziggy out for a walk, eat more, practice the clarinet.

What was your most meaningful performance? There have been many, but here's a recent good one: November 2018, Smetana's *Má Vlast* with the CSO conducted by Daniel Barenboim, his first return to our orchestra since he resigned the Music Directorship in 2008. My wife Teresa Reilly playing 2nd Clarinet. Also, June 2013, playing guest Bass Clarinet with the Hong Kong Philharmonic for the Rite of Spring centennial. My daughter Molly Yeh was guest percussionist on that same program. It was the first time we ever played in an orchestra together.

What's one thing you wish you had known when you began your career? When you get nominated for a Grammy, drop everything and attend the awards ceremony!

What's your favorite app?
Facebook.



Photo credit: Todd Rosenberg Photography

Who is your favorite composer right now? Teresa Reilly.

What is your favorite trait in a conductor? A perfect balance of musical integrity, humor, and skillful psychology.

What's the first piece of music you remember falling in love with?
Schubert's *Shepherd on the Rock*.

What is the one common myth about your profession or field that you want to debunk?
Playing the clarinet is easy.

CODA

If you weren't a clarinet player, what would be your profession?
A doctor, a chef, or a public servant.

If you had a time machine, where would you visit? **Vienna, January 2020, and re-living that wonderful CSO tour with my family along.**

If you had a superpower, what would it be?
To always play the clarinet the way I want it to sound.

If you could rid yourself of one personal fear, what would that be?
The fear that people will disregard me.

If you had to choose a first name other than your own, what would that be?
Bronislaw.

If you could play in any orchestra other than your own, which would it be?
The Berlin Philharmonic.