

Classical musician returns to her mountain roots



Musician Lindsay McIntosh comes full circle as her career brings her back to the Sierra. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

INCLINE VILLAGE – “If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere” from “New York, New York” could have been classical musician Lindsay McIntosh’s theme.

Catapulted from her humble beginnings in the Truckee High School band, McIntosh did make it in the Big Apple as the song implies – and then some.

At a mere age 34, the Julliard-trained oboist takes a lifetime of achievement to return home with her craft. Now as deputy director of Classical Tahoe, she's instrumental at staging the world-renowned summer music festival and institute to celebrate the arts for three weeks starting July 8 at Sierra Nevada College.

Big endeavor? Yes. But from her early days playing in the Truckee High School band onto a full scholarship at the world's premier music school, she's never shied away from a challenge, hard work and the dream to make and curate classical music.

Case in point – delving into her professional life may result in being handed three or more business cards.

Five years ago, McIntosh hit the fast track. She used her second year at Julliard to enhance her desire to lead and create musical events by founding New Vintage Baroque, an ensemble dedicated to historical instruments used to perform a 21st century repertoire.

She produced 25 programs, took in more than \$100,000 in fundraising, established a board of directors, commissioned 17 world premiere performances, collaborated on three opera productions, recorded an album of original works on the VIA label and played in 75 performances in New York, Connecticut, California and the Netherlands.



From Truckee High Lindsay McIntosh went on to Julliard. Photo/Susan Wood

Four years later, the oboist took her decade of expertise to launch Coburn Music – which staged pop-up concerts in Truckee. It’s SXSW in Austin meets the Sierra Nevada.

Her heavy involvement in the music world has given her a lot of insight, many contacts and much joy.

“My whole experience is rooted in hard work,” McIntosh told *Lake Tahoe News* over coffee at her hangout blocks from her new home – the I.V. Coffee Lab.

The sense of accomplishment leads to her happiness.

“When I’m sitting there with an orchestra, I’m being a part of something bigger than myself. I can’t create that without playing,” she said.

She recalled growing up trying out different woodwind

instruments but wondered which one “would get me a job.” She was destined to play the oboe because, if anything, it required more than practice to perfect it. Oboists make their own reeds, adjusting their shapes to accommodate certain sounds.



Lindsay McIntosh in 2000 during a band-a-thon in Truckee.
Photo/Provided

“There’s a lot of back pressure in oboes. You can either play it or you can’t,” she said, displaying a few she’s constructed from a special cane produced in France. “You either sound like an angel from heaven or a squawking duck.”

This was her assessment as she advanced from high school to an undergraduate program in Turlock to Boston University to Julliard.

So why return to a sleepy, small mountain town versus the lights of the city “that never sleeps?”

For all her accomplishments, McIntosh has a humble side – crediting her operatic husband, mother, high school bandleader, best friend and fellow musician as well as the Truckee community for helping her make her mark on the music world.

Julliard teaches more than how to be the best musician. A student takes classes in how to be a whole person, immersed in one's industry. There's even a class on how to behave during receptions.

"I never thought I'd leave New York. I was there for six years, but (the music scene) is oversaturated," she said. "I was connected to the music world in New York, but I wanted to give back."

It's almost like she knew all along she'd eventually come home to her roots. With creating the weeklong Coburn Music festival on a trip home last summer, her transcontinental outreach prompted her to bring home a handful of accomplished musicians in their own right to play at various Truckee venues. The experience put her in touch with Classical Tahoe Executive Director Karen Craig. Both admired each other's work from across the country.

When a job opening at Classical Tahoe came open on the day McIntosh was meeting with Craig's associate in New York, it was nothing short of serendipity.

Today, McIntosh couldn't imagine her professional life anywhere other than Classical Tahoe – where plans for making it a year-round venue are floating around.

"We went after each other. The bottom line is, either timing is everything or the stars were in line," Craig said of landing McIntosh. The oboist describes the experience the same way.

"What intrigued me the most is she was raised here. She's a

total go-getter who earned a scholarship from the top music school," she said.



Lindsay McIntosh at a Boston University recital.
Photo/Provided

Craig added McIntosh's notable charisma, gifted talent and intrepid characteristics that have helped her seize "uncharted waters."

It's a long way from those early days in Truckee when McIntosh labored over music theory and stayed after school to practice her scales with bandleader David Green, who's now retired after 24 years.

"She's dedicated to what she does and gives it 110 percent," Green said of McIntosh. The teacher didn't know she would be so successful because she "had trouble with her rhythms," but "she worked really hard."

Her best friend and fellow musician in high school, Brandon Dolph, noticed the same traits. The two musicians never dated when they were young (he dated her best friend), but they were always there for each other. (McIntosh was a bridesmaid at Dolph's wedding.)

"Lindsay struggled. I helped her with her theory. This doesn't come naturally to some kids," said the trumpeter, who runs a Reno music shop. "She had to work harder. Because of that, she developed a work ethic that's tenacious."

One day, it all clicked. Then, McIntosh accelerated and "reached a level we can only dream of," he added. "I'm super happy she's home."

He intends to attend McIntosh's labor of love.

Classical Tahoe's summer music festival features 350 terraced seats with a diverse lineup of iconic experiences honoring legendary composers like Beethoven and Mozart and performed by musicians from the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony to the Seattle Symphony and Los Angeles Philharmonic.

As majestic as the music sounds in idyllic natural surroundings, Craig portrays the setting as intimate – quite a departure from the usual symphonic metro venues seating thousands of people.