

# Pittsburgh Symphony musicians take to their bikes

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By Elizabeth Bloom / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

LUCERNE, Switzerland -- The musicians in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra were allowed to bring two pieces of luggage with them on their three-week tour of Europe this summer. For principal percussionist Andy Reamer, deciding what to put in one of those suitcases was easy.

"My second piece has been a bicycle for many years now," said Mr. Reamer, who regularly bikes to Heinz Hall from his home in the North Side. He has a bike that folds up to fit.

Mr. Reamer is one of a handful of PSO musicians who have been using the PSO's 2013 European festivals tour to explore the continent on two wheels.

The musicians bring or rent bicycles for myriad reasons. For principal timpanist Ed Stephan, riding his bike allows him to bond with colleagues and get exercise during the trip. He has taken his own bike on tours since he started traveling with orchestras, including on his three international tours with the PSO.

And biking has given him the opportunity to forge paths outside of the PSO's main stops -- cities in Austria, France, Germany, Romania and Switzerland.

"Cities are getting more and more similar," he said, adding, "We get to see what a place is really like."

Sights have included Austria's wine country, a 17th-century monastery in Romania and the Palace of Versailles during a 78-mile ride in France. In rural Romania, a group of musicians encountered a farmer driving a carriage that was holding corn and what appeared to be the farmer's wife in tow.

Mr. Stephan, who rides almost daily in Pittsburgh and has cycled competitively, sees parallels between his musical and athletic endeavors. He learned to apply to music the strategies he developed by training for races. Although he used to practice music 10 hours every day, cycling taught him the value of practicing for shorter, more focused amounts of time. Now, he tells his students at Duquesne University to be efficient during their practice sessions.

"Athletes don't train like maniacs. They do when they're training, but they rest as hard as they work," he said.

And because openings for timpanist spots are rare, entering races gave him a goal to focus on between

auditions.

"It was a way to work on something, refine it and put it out there," he said.

While biking provides players with a break on the concert-heavy tour, the musicians-cum-cyclists have to keep certain things in mind, such as leaving extra time before performances in case they get lost or making sure they have enough strength for an evening's pieces. On one trip with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra to Vail, Colo., Mr. Stephan cycled at a higher altitude than he was used to, which tired him out for the rest of the tour.

"There are all sorts of things that you have to make sure are accounted for so you're not stranded in the middle of nowhere," he said.

And as much as Mr. Reamer enjoys biking, it still isn't his favorite part of traveling with the orchestra.

"For me, the best part of touring is the concerts," he said.

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