

BY JOHN REID

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JARED SYCH

# HOPE FOR CHANGE

SINCE RECOVERING FROM NEAR-BANKRUPTCY IN 2003, THE CALGARY PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA HAS FORGED A NEW IDENTITY — STILL COMMITTED TO QUALITY, BUT ALSO REACHING OUT TO FOSTER COMMUNITY — AND ONE MUSICIAN HAS BEEN THE FACE OF THAT CHANGE

**PLAYING IN A** professional symphony orchestra is a very demanding profession. Each musician is constantly preparing very difficult music for performance on a weekly basis with a minimum of rehearsal. Mistakes are simply not an option. Mental, physical and emotional stress is high. And so musicians should perhaps be forgiven if they feel that achieving an excellent performance is ample service to their employer. Indeed, that used to be the general attitude among the musicians at the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra (CPO).

However, since the revival of the CPO following its near-bankruptcy and receivership — October 2002 to February 2003 — the contracted core musicians of the orchestra have taken a serious interest in promoting the symphony's

activities above and beyond their commitments to perform as professional musicians.

They have taken a new attitude, that in addition to a commitment to excellence in their playing (the CPO remains one of the top three or four orchestras in the country), they want to reach out to audiences.

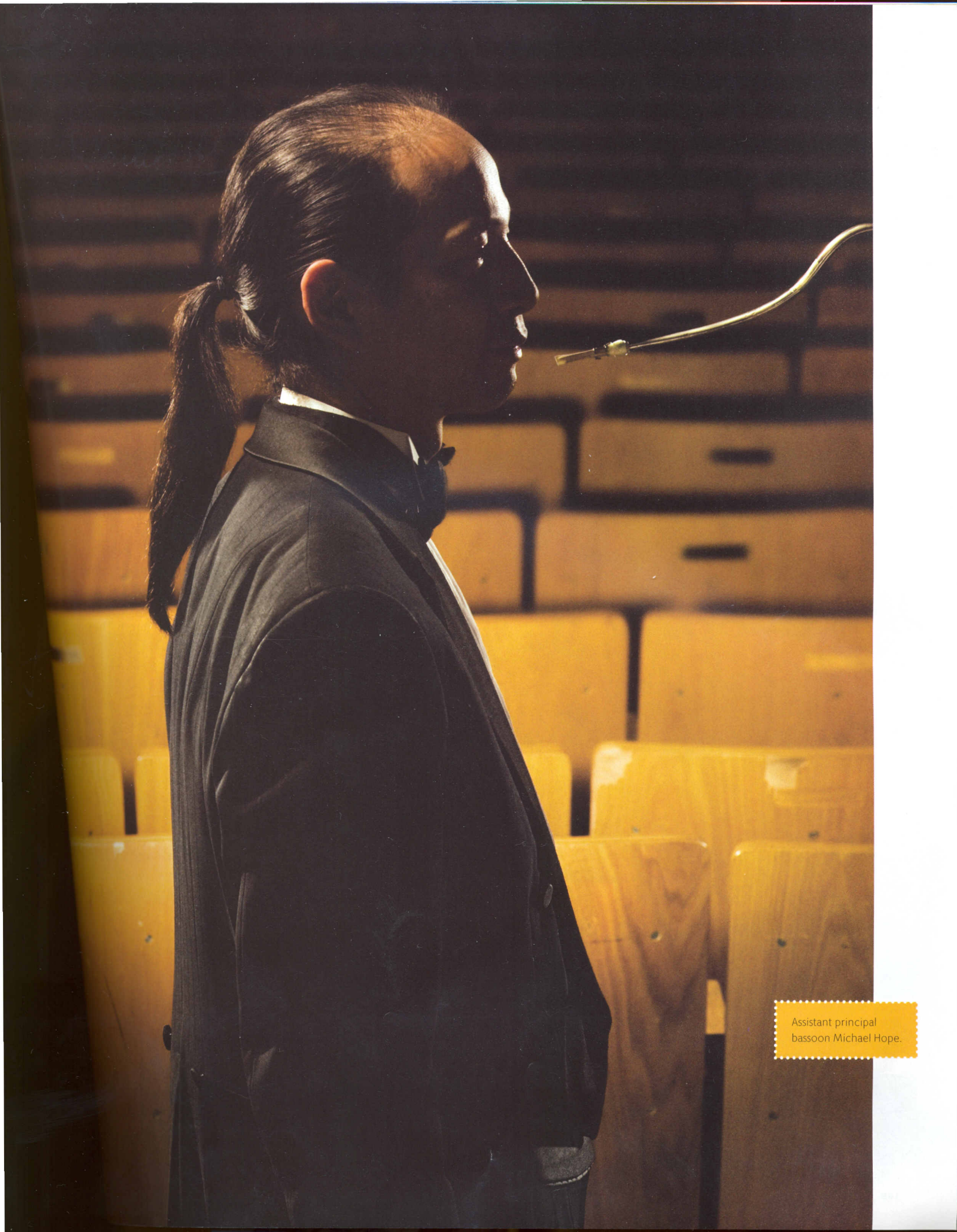
Michael Hope, assistant principal bassoon, has taken that mission to tremendous lengths, and while music director Roberto Minczuk is the nominal visage for the Philharmonic, Hope has emerged as the true musicians' face of the orchestra.

"There was a period of time when the CPO was disconnected from the community and had an elitist image," Hope says. "There was also [a bit of] a disconnect between the orchestra's musicians and the board of directors. Now, both groups see the musicians as a promotional resource."

Hope has been one of the people instrumental in bridging the gaps between not only the CPO and the audience, but also between the musicians and the board. In addition to playing bassoon in the orchestra (he is a 26-year veteran), Hope spends his time organizing a CD sales booth in the Jack Singer Concert Hall lobby at concerts, is the coordinator of pre- and post-show chats, and is a five-year member of the CPO Board of Directors.

"We want to let Calgary know more about orchestra's humanity," says Hope about not only his efforts, but those of other volunteers and musicians. "We have members of the community playing in the orchestra that have done so for decades and will for decades to come. A number have people skills, so they come out before concerts to thank sponsors and people for coming. The audience likes getting to know the orchestra, sponsors like it; >>





Assistant principal  
bassoon Michael Hope.





## ON STAGE

This month, the CPO presents The Ultimate Beethoven Festival. This will be the first time in Calgary that audiences will be able to hear all nine of Beethoven's symphonies played in order, as well as the complete cello sonatas. To better understand the music and the man behind it, the CPO will also present *Speaking of Beethoven: A Discussion of the Man, the Master and the Music* and a screening of the film *Immortal Beloved*, starring Gary Oldman.

The festival runs from November 19 to 29. Tickets, schedules and more information are available at [cpo-live.com](http://cpo-live.com).

it's kind of like [Calgary Flames captain] Jarome [Iginla] thanking sponsors for buying Saddledome rinkboard ads!"

Hope's volunteer efforts began when he started the CD booth. "Eleven years ago, I made my first CD [as a singer]. I asked administration if there would be value in selling CDs in the lobby and they agreed. Every night, [assistant principal French horn] Bill Hopson and I would volunteer [Hopson had released his first alphorn CD]. People bought them." Hope began to order more stock, including repertoire that the orchestra plays and music that guest artists were playing, and found the booth benefited the

CPO, the Epcor Centre (the orchestra's landlord) and the audience. "[The audience is] turned on to the musical experience. Everyone wants to carry home some kind of souvenir; that's what they are there for," says Hope.

Pre-show chats provide a bit of adult education for audiences who seem to savour any information they can glean for the concert they are about to experience. "A pre-show chat is music ed. for grownups," says Hope. "People need a comfortable entry point to help understand this music, so before selected concerts we have a series where we bring in conductors to speak about the music."

Hope also coordinates Afterthoughts, an after-concert chat with orchestra musicians, guests and conductors reflecting on the concert that just concluded. Orchestra musicians, including principal cello Phil Hansen, assistant principal clarinet Jocelyn Colquhoun, section violin Steve Lubiarsz and associate conductor Pierre Simard, have all been valuable contributors to these chats, sharing their expertise in an accessible way with the audience.

As to his involvement on the CPO board, Hope acknowledges the labour management dichotomy is adversarial by nature, but the new CPO has come to realize that, to be successful, they have to work toward the same goals.

"We are a team and family," he says. "What is best for the organization is what is best for every single person. We are truly all focused on the same thing; that is, what is best for community."

He takes his hockey analogy one step further: "NHL VP Bill Daly recently said that he is not bothered by escalating salaries, because of linkage [54 per cent of league revenue must be paid out in player salaries], it is good because the players and the teams are making more money."

But it's one thing to see the value in all of this work getting done and another thing entirely to do it yourself. Not only that, but in addition to his professional and volunteer commitments to the CPO, Hope is a family man. So how does he keep it all going?

"[At the Philharmonic,] we are exposed every day to a product that is rejuvenating, sustaining, filled with energy and passion," he says. "It is like a fountain of youth."

And Hope sees a bright future ahead. "With all of its ups and downs, I have never worried about the state of classical music. It has been alive and healthy for 400 years," he points out.

"It is important and will continue to be important. People who work in this industry are given an incredible amount of energy, drive and passion to get the job done; that is what passion does to you, keeps it going. I always have a full tank."