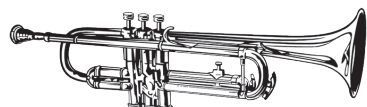




# THE MUSIC MAN

BY STACI ELDER HENSLEY

AS OU'S RESIDENT TRUMPETER EXTRAORDINAIRE,  
KARL SIEVERS IS HAVING A BLAST.



**K**ARL SIEVERS has never known a time when music wasn't part of his life, and you'll seldom find him without a trumpet in hand. Not a day goes by when he isn't indulging his love for the instrument he first picked up as a fourth-grader. In a 53-year career he's performed with many of the biggest names in the music industry – illustrious performers that include Doc Severinsen, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder and Al Jarreau.

Since 1999, Sievers has been passing along his skills and passion for music to generations of OU students, serving as a tenured professor and head of the trumpet section in the OU School of Music. In addition to his faculty appointment, he's also first trumpet for the Oklahoma City Philharmonic and the Norman Philharmonic, part of the Oklahoma City Jazz Orchestra, and he performs with local groups the Frontier Brass Band and the Opulent Brass Quintet. As if that weren't enough to keep him busy, he's an artist/clinician for the Vincent Bach Corp. – one of the premier instrument manufacturers in the country – and general manager for the annual National Trumpet Competition in Washington, D.C.

Fortunately, being busy is exactly how Sievers likes it, especially when the bulk of his time is spent sharing a love of music with others. He has a well-established reputation as a tough but fair professor, and his first-day handout to new students includes a sheet with the quote, "If you don't do it, you're telling me you don't want it."

Students who rise to the challenge sing his praises. "Learn all you can – he's amazing," is one of many compliments left on OU's student reviews web page. "Class was exactly what I would expect from a masterfully taught trumpet class," says another. "In the six years I studied with Dr. Sievers, I went from a merely mediocre trumpet player to one who could tackle a lot of different literature without breaking a sweat." Yet another wrote, "It's very simple to keep Dr. Sievers happy – just show evidence that you're doing your homework and having the horn on your face every day and that you're working at it." *continued*



Music is a way of life for OU professor Karl Sievers. In addition to his faculty appointment, he's also first trumpet for the Oklahoma City Philharmonic and the Norman Philharmonic, part of the Oklahoma City Jazz Orchestra, and he performs with local groups the Frontier Brass Band and the Opulent Brass Quintet.

Teaching, meanwhile, is just as important to Sievers as playing. "I had two of the best teachers available, so I know the importance of it," he says. "Knowing I can pass the legacy on to the next generation of young folks is an honor. I also humbly think I have a gift for it."

Sievers instructs students in the same manner as his own primary teacher and mentor, William Adam. An internationally renowned trumpet player and instructor, Adam's teaching methods focused on developing a player's individual sound, rather than simply mastering rigid style techniques. Sievers remains dedicated to the memory of his mentor, so much so that three years ago he organized the William Adam International

Trumpet Festival, hosted by the OU School of Music in mid-summer. This year's gathering was attended by a who's who of trumpet players from around the world, providing an invaluable experience for OU music students to play with the pros. The festival concludes each year with free performances that are open to the general public.

"Bill Adam's influence on the trumpet world, in particular on music education, cannot be overstated," Sievers says. "Our festival keeps his memory alive and is a chance for trumpet players and students to gather and share their passion. By offering the free concerts, we also are able to share that passion and love of this instrument with the larger public."

## Sievers' Greatest Hits

The OU College of Music hosts approximately 400 concerts and events throughout the year, many of them featuring Sievers and his students. He can also be seen with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, the Norman Philharmonic and the Frontier Brass Band.

Meanwhile, check some of Sievers' performances here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjAHNdH7-Hc>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJ9o9Wfl\\_Qg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJ9o9Wfl_Qg)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D4dRSM5fX8>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TS96FTddKB0>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Q\\_H8aCGaQ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Q_H8aCGaQ8)

Sievers grew up in Louisville, Ky. While they weren't musicians, his parents nevertheless loved music and took Sievers, his brother and sister to a steady stream of local concerts. Many of them were put on by local military bands, and Sievers was immediately drawn to the trumpet. He began lessons at age 9, and as a high-schooler was taught by professional performers Delbert Hoon and Leon Rapiet of the Louisville Symphony Orchestra.

"I remember as a little kid being absolutely dazzled by the brass instruments, even before elementary school," he says. "I guess from a kid's view it had the lead, so it was the most important. Plus, I simply like the way it feels in my hand and the way it sounds. If that creativity's in you, it's gonna explode."

At age 14, Sievers won an international North American competition, earning a spot as first trumpet in a student group called "American Youth Performs." Only four students were selected, with the others hailing from Canada, Mexico and the U.S. One of their performances was at the famed Carnegie Hall, allowing Sievers to achieve a major life goal at a very early age.

"Having this experience meant that by the time I got to college, I knew what I was doing," he says. "Plus I had great teachers all the way through, and a lot of music students don't get that."

With his talent already well established, Sievers was readily accepted into the prestigious music program at Indiana University, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in trumpet. From there he attended the University of Missouri's Conservatory of Music in Kansas City, where he completed his Doctor of Musical Arts degree, also in trumpet.

He spent several years playing professionally, including two years touring with The Lettermen, plus countless studio sessions and stints with a number of orchestras across the U.S. In 1999, he was offered professorships at his alma mater and OU and opted to become a Sooner. It's a decision he's never regretted.

"I was 44, had young children, had completed my doctorate and was marketable," he says. "OU treated me like they were thrilled to have me. It was also at that time that I won the principal job with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic. Professionally it's been a very good mix – performing and teaching." Sievers' wife, Beth, shares his musical talent and is a violinist with the OKC Philharmonic.

Out of all his professional experiences, Sievers says the most special for him has been performing with legendary trumpeter Doc Severinsen.

"Sharing the stage with Doc is a lifelong dream that came true, as he was my childhood trumpet idol and still is," he says. "He's a neat guy – funny, personable and probably the greatest all-around trumpeter who ever lived."

All his various commitments mean that Sievers is performing somewhere at least five or six days out of each week, and he wouldn't

have it any other way.

"The crazy thing is that, even after 53 years of playing, I love what I do," he says. "My favorite thing is to put my horns in the truck and go play."

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*Staci Elder Hensley is a freelance writer living in Norman.*