

Date: September 9th, 2019

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Michael Stotts
Managing Director
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Dear Mr. Stotts,

Congratulations on becoming the new Papermill Playhouse Managing Director earlier this year. I hope you have a tenure of many happy and productive years in your leadership position.

I am uniquely qualified to give you feedback on the performance of *Beauty and the Beast* at the Paper Mill Playhouse on the evening of Saturday, June 29. The reason I say uniquely is because my spouse and I are avid Broadway and Theatre Patron's. We have attended performances all North America and Canada. Also uniquely qualified because I am a graduated of Manhattan School of Music in Trumpet Performance, and actively sub for players at the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, along with being a Freelance Trumpet Artist and member of Local 802 AFM.

I have known Mike Ponella for over 10 years, and we have both been long standing students of Pedagogue and Trumpet Master Jerome Callet in New York City who recently passed away at the age of 89.

I would like to convey to you my thoughts because I thought it might be helpful coming from a seasoned Professionally Trained Musician and Trumpet player. I just saw Mike Ponella in Manhattan during his performance with Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks where he has been playing lead trumpet for over 10 years and was with the band when they were up for a Grammy Award for Best Compilation Soundtrack for Visual Media, *Boardwalk Empire Volume 1: Music from the HBO Original Series*, 2012. It was due to Mike's musical contribution and trumpet virtuosity that made this possible.

When I attended "*Beauty and the Beast*" I couldn't help but notice how overly busy the trumpet parts were, playing constantly, taking away from the score, and as a trumpeter who has subbed at the Metropolitan Opera I was mortified about the constant trumpet playing demands being placed on the Paper Mill trumpeters that night.

Trumpet playing is a form of athletics and psychological prowess that is, one a gift built into a person's DNA and two combined with years of professional training. As you know the Trumpet is the most difficult wind instrument to master due to its transposition needs, lack of a sound producer, and the physical fitness, health, and clear mind required to play on Mike Ponella's level. Although the score was quite disturbing from a brass playing perspective, Mike Ponella sounded marvelous at the performance and in my opinion was right on target. The pitch, style, transposition, rhythmic concept, time, dynamics, tone quality, blending with the other instrumentalists, key signature changes and reading were as the expected result of whatever comes out of his horn on any given night – which is perfection and quality. We could expect no less because he has been recognized and endorsed by the top conductors, composers, arrangers, musical directors, band leaders, front men, fellow trumpet players on all levels, vocalists, actors and other instrumentalists both in the commercial and symphonic musical communities. Even stagehands in Local One IATSE have mentioned to me personally that when he is in the pit it is something special. The performance goes different in a grand way.

Not knowing all the facts and just going by my assessment of the performance that evening I have a feeling that apparently the conductor of "Beauty and the Beast" doesn't understand how an overloaded orchestra reduction will affect his trumpet players in a negative way.

I do not know for sure but maybe his thought was not to give the demands placed upon Mike Ponella any consideration, which in a way placed him into a position to appear as inexperienced and thoughtless about his artists.

That night I witnessed two things. As a long time, music business trumpeter myself, the conductor didn't understand the difficulty of playing that book and seemed not to care. I used the word inexperienced because it seemed like the conductor impulsively decided that the other trumpeters would be able to play it fine. It seemed like reckless disregard, like he was in a rush and threw this thing together, like he had better things to do. The instrumentalists are the ones on the line because if they clam notes, come in on the wrong beat, or become fatigued they are out of a job.

After speaking with Mike Ponella about this the next day, he told me once the books were switched, the conductor offered all kinds of favors and assistance (i.e. No impossible instrument switches, leaving out many parts so they would not have to play them, etc.). None of these pleasant compromises were afforded to Mike Ponella.

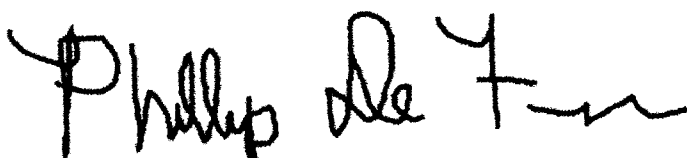
Unfortunately, it seems the conductor's goal was to have someone else on trumpet cover Mike Ponella's chair before the rehearsals even started.

That is not proper treatment of someone like Mike Ponella. He has an outstanding performance reputation and has worked successfully with some of the greatest conductors, of all musical styles, in the music business.

If you have a good business sense Mr. Stotts, I would think you would realize Mike Ponella was "set up" with a bad orchestration reduction. This should not be held against him and his great reputation. The conductor evidently "played favorites", in a bad way, and unfortunately for you Mike Ponella is very upset with the letter you sent to him from the Paper Mill.

Mike Ponella always had a positive attitude, giving the theatre top priority, even over his family and his undevoted dedication over many years to the theatre. I'm afraid you may have unfairly tarnished Mike Ponella's view, of you, of the rest of management and of the theater for not backing him up and supporting him as your dedicated 1st trumpeter and a member of the musical and theatrical family at the Paper Mill Playhouse.

Sincerely,



Phil DeFranco