

UPBEAT

For This Trumpet Player, No Such Thing As Too Busy

In case you think you're doing too much, consider trumpet player Catherine Sheridan: a full-time civil engineer who heads up major infrastructure projects for New York State, she is also a near-full-time freelancer in pit orchestras for Broadway touring productions and a member of two busy per-service orchestras, the Schenectady Symphony and the Glens Falls Symphony. But we're not done yet. Sheridan is a member of four separate AFM Locals: 14 (Albany, NY), 85-133 (Schenectady-Amsterdam, NY), 506 (Saratoga, NY), and 802 (New York City). She's also president and secretary-treasurer respectively of Local 85-133 and Local 506.

Still feeling like you're doing too much? Asked if she does anything else, Sheridan immediately answers with an emphatic "No," but then laughs disarmingly. One would indeed wonder where she'd find time to do anything else—starting with practicing the trumpet. "Practicing is definitely a challenge," agrees Sheridan. "I try to get my playing in after I get home from my engineering job. But this has become tougher during the pandemic, since I'm spending many more hours with engineering." Sleep deprivation, she says with another laugh, just becomes a way of life.

Sheridan, who grew up in Albany, NY, decided on the trumpet in fourth grade "because it was shiny." A trumpet performance major and graduate of Boston University's College of Fine Arts, she joined the Army reserves after college, serving eight years and then transitioning into engineering through seasonal employment as a construction inspector for the New York State Transportation Department. Following a master's degree in civil engineering and engineering mechanics at Columbia University, Sheridan worked her way up to director of maintenance and operations for the New York State Canal Corporation in Albany, subsequently promoted to chief engineer for the New York State Thruway Authority. She is currently a project manager at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City. Sheridan speaks passionately about all of these jobs, with the same enthusiasm as the trumpet.

"Engineering gigs are all unique," she explains. "The canal system is a gem, a national historic landmark that had a lasting impact on the economy of the entire nation. I was



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Catherine Sheridan uses:

- Laskey-Pinc Bb and C trumpets
- Van Laar flugelhorn
- Schilke cornets and higher pitch trumpets
- Schagerl rotary trumpets
- Pickett Brass & GR Technologies mouthpieces
- Gard Elite bags
- JH Audio IEMs

proud to help preserve that piece of New York State. But as an engineer, the reward isn't about the specific agency or infrastructure. I've always worked in government as a public servant. For me it's about working to make New York State a better place for New Yorkers." Whether that's a highway, bridge,

or commuter railroad, says Sheridan, it's all rewarding because you're giving back to your fellow citizens.

Sheridan's feelings on playing music are unsurprisingly similar. Trained as a symphony orchestra musician, most of her freelance



work these days is in the musical theater pit, playing for Broadway touring productions. Past engagements have included *Legally Blonde*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Book of Mormon*, and *Wicked*. Runs can involve eight shows a week plus rehearsals—on top of her full-time engineering responsibilities. Regardless of the type of performance, Sheridan says the music takes the stress away from the engineering. "Both jobs are high pressure and intense," she says. "One is a release from the other, and they balance each other out." But do they ever overlap? This gets another hearty laugh. "You have to make the separation. When I play a show, I'm focused on that and not thinking about the engineering work." Audiences, she says, are there for release from their own pressures of the day. "They don't care if I had a rough day at my other job. They just need to hear me play well."

This same dedicated work ethic ties in with Sheridan's AFM involvement. "So many musicians are out of work right now, and they need union help," she says. "Local 85-133, where I'm currently president, has a separate 501(c)(3) that helps musicians in booking work. It's made up of programs where we partner with the community on things like a jazz series or summer concert series. We've been able to sustain these for a number of years." Sheridan proudly points out that even as a small local, 85-133 has over 100 active union members. She also says several locals she's involved with are actively working on livestreaming opportunities for area musicians, attempting to keep them engaged. "Determining how we go back to work post-COVID-19 is crucial. We need to keep our musicians safe, and also make sure they're not being taken advantage of by employers."

Sheridan is also a member of the Theater Musicians Association. At their annual conference, they faced similar issues. "The added question for them is how do we return to work without having electronic music take over?"

One musician, and a multitude of jobs. Rather than feeling overworked, Sheridan feels empowered, because she can give back. "I know a lot of musicians who have other jobs, but they're not happy. I'm a very lucky person."