

NIEF-NORF SUMMER FESTIVAL: A PARTICIPANT'S PERSPECTIVE

BY JORDAN CURCURUTO

Nief-norf is a nonprofit organization that runs an interdisciplinary summer music festival (nnSF) focusing on the performance, creation, and discussion of contemporary solo and chamber music. Through the course of the two-week festival, university students and professionals from across the United States and abroad collaborate on numerous concerts, work closely with guest artists and composers, and attend a variety of lectures. After having such a rewarding experience at nnSF 2014, I knew I had to return, and it has been the highlight of my summer for two consecutive years.



This year was different than last year, and it has definitely shaped me as a musician. Being an alumnus this year made my experience even more rewarding. I was now very familiar with the faculty and also looking forward to seeing other returning fellows who have become good friends and colleagues. The value of this festival is easily attested to by the fact that about half of the percussion fellows this year were alumni. The challenging repertoire, fascinating research presentations, and amazing performers make this experience valuable and memorable.

I performed four major, challenging works, each of which were over 15 minutes in length. Because we had only two to

three days, rather than the usual “school-time” preparation of three to six months to prepare for a concert, I learned a great deal about how to prepare chamber music in a short amount of time. Rehearsals have to be efficient, personal preparation is vital, and a good attitude is non-negotiable—especially if you have been rehearsing one piece for eight hours!



One of the biggest changes this year was the festival moving from Furman University in South Carolina to the new music building at the University of Tennessee (UT), Knoxville. The UT School of Music is a perfect fit for the nief-norf Summer Festival. The recital hall boasts state-of-the-art audio and video equipment to complement its superb acoustics, and the practice and rehearsal spaces are bright and welcoming. The percussion storage area is a dream with rows of organized, labeled shelves and an abundance of both manufactured and homemade instruments. Behind large, roll-up doors are cabinets full of accessories and mallets, pegboards with complete collections of almglocken, Thai gongs, a plethora of world percussion, and more.

To facilitate all of the festival logistics is a dedicated staff of interns. Equipment is ready beforehand in a rehearsal space, and someone is always around to answer questions or to retrieve a hard-to-find item. Concerts run smoothly because of their careful planning, and each day is enjoyable because of their hard work.

The performance fellows, composition fellows, staff, and faculty constantly interact in rehearsals and master classes, but we also live in the same dorm buildings and eat every meal in the same cafeteria. After concerts, we would all go to a bar or restaurant in trendy, downtown Knoxville. In addition to aiding

our relaxing and socializing, Knoxville's downtown provided a fresh variety of performance venues.

One of the first performances this summer was an entire chamber concert of Philip Glass's early music. We performed at a great space in downtown Knoxville, which brought this unique experience to the public. I have never heard of a concert consisting of only Glass's compositions, but nnSF is one of the few places something like that could happen. Even better, the keynote research presentation from that day, given by David Chapman, was centered on Philip Glass, making the performance that night even more interesting.

The next night, the performance fellows had a chance to show off their individual talents at the festival's Cabaret Concert. The concert was held at a local coffee shop and was jam-packed with solos from almost every performance fellow, as well as some of the faculty.

I have met some talented, passionate people through this festival with whom I continue to keep in contact. Many are performers, but working with the composers has always been my favorite part. Even when not working directly with the composers, I was able to talk with a lot of them during group hangs. I loved listening and discussing music with them. I think the greatest benefit to the composers is the time they get individually with different musicians at the festival, as well as other composers.

I highly recommend attending this festival. As a performance fellow, you are asked to be at your best for rehearsals and are worked hard during the entire two-week festival. I appreciated the rigorous schedule because I knew my time and money were not being wasted; I was constantly learning and engaging in a unique experience. With that being said, there are still opportunities for downtime, networking, and making new friends. This festival offers a unique opportunity to learn challeng-



ing repertoire alongside inspiring colleagues, and I am thankful to have found such a special group of like-minded people. I am a proud nief-norfer!

Applications for the 2016 nief-norf Summer Festival are now open! Apply by December 15 to receive the early-application discount: <http://www.niefnorf.org/apply>

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