Honor Choir Has a Lasting Impact

The NKU Honor Choir is a long-standing fixture in the choral studies program. NKU alum Jason McKee brings students from his choir at Glen Este High School to Honor Choir every year. As a former NKU music student, he says, “In the beginning, the first couple of years, it was surreal. Now it’s just part of the annual tradition of what we do.”

This year, 185 auditioned singers from high schools across the region came together for one weekend (Nov. 7-9) to learn to work together and, on Tuesday night, put on a concert.

In the past, many Honor Choir participants have come to NKU after high school to study everything from biology to law to (sometimes) music. Pennington sees Honor Choir as a great recruitment tool for the university as a whole.

“If I have a student that starts as a freshman, they do four years [in Honor Choir]. They’re acclimated to NKU, and I see them on campus. They’re not necessarily music majors. But they come to NKU and they’re in a variety of other disciplines,” he says.

Honor Choir Has a Major Impact on the Lives of Students

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Dr. Frank Restesan grew up in Europe, and his knowledge of American music was limited at best. “I was not familiar with most American music. It’s not very often performed,” he says.

Years later, Restesan has chosen to celebrate the rarely performed music with the NKU Philharmonic Orchestra’s performance of “An American Symphony,” featuring the music of Aaron Copland and Amy Beach.

Beach died in 1944, but as Restesan says, “She is now rediscovered. She was an Irish American, based in Boston, and so the symphony we’re doing is called ‘Gaelic.’ It’s really a cool piece. It’s a little difficult, but I think it’s worth it.”

Restesan describes a recent trend in performing American music as, “Trying to go back to the roots, trying to find an American sentiment.”

Symphony lovers can help Restesan and the NKU Philharmonic Orchestra find that sentiment on Monday, December 13 at 8:00 p.m. in Greaves Concert Hall. Admission is $5 general/$3 with student ID.
NKU Jazz Continues to Grow

Professor William Brian Hogg has big plans. He takes great pride in the growth of NKU’s young jazz program, firing off a list of expectations with no hesitation. “The philosophy of the jazz degree is kind of a triple threat theme,” he says. “We want the [students] to be able to play, to be able to write, and to be able to teach so that they’re not pigeonholed into just one concept of jazz. We just want our [students] to be as diverse as possible, which is necessary to be a performer.”

He also talks about the future, and where he hopes to see the program go. “We’re starting a Latin jazz ensemble in the spring to incorporate Latin jazz and the Latin community and its music into our [students’] experience,” he says. “Down the road, we’d like to bring in song writing and sound engineering and things like that.”

But for the moment, Hogg has his students focusing on expanding their reach, and taking their talents on the road. “We’re partnering with Dayton High School—we’ve already started providing instruction there. We’re looking to go to France with faculty and maybe with one student this year. We’ve got a lot of international stuff going on.”

As the fall semester draws to a close, Hogg looks to the spring and the events which are so crucial to the success of the jazz program. “In February, we have the Gordon Brisker Memorial concert. Joe Gaudio’s going to be a part of that. In March, we have a battle of the big bands down in Lexington with UK and Eastern Kentucky University, so we’re going down to play that, and we’ll hit some high schools on the way.”

In March, students will participate in the fourth annual Blue’s Festival at the Madison Theatre. “It’s a fundraiser for the Empower program. We’ll be hosting that and playing on that,” Hogg says. And in April, NKU will host its biggest jazz event of the year, the Jazz Festival.

Professor Hogg believes in the jazz program, and he is enthusiastic about the future. “Two years ago, there was a major in the jazz program. Now there are sixteen.”

Voice Students Place at NATS

Over the weekend of October 22 & 23, twenty-one NKU voice students competed in a pool of nearly two hundred at the Kentucky statewide National Association for Teacher of Singing (NATS) competition at Berea College.

All twenty-one made it to the semi-finals, and four went on to place in the finals. Anna Egan, a sophomore who studies voice under Gayle Grout, took second place in her division. Egan feels that at NATS is an invaluable educational experience.

“I came into it with that mindset that I don’t have to be the best. I just have to be the best that I can be,” she says. “It’s more about the learning experience and about what the judges have to say about your singing and what you do with that information.”

Egan believes that competitions such as NATS better prepare voice students for work once they’ve left the university setting because it forces them out of their comfort zones.

“It was very interesting to see the mindset of the other schools and the other students,” she says. “You get blinkers on when you’re just at one university, and when I see other people, I realize these are the people I’m competing against, so I have to step up my game.”

Other top finishers included Chelsea Fries, Tatiana Davis, and Melissa Nelson. Congratulations to all!
Celebration of the Season

For three years, Dr. Randy Pennington has been taking his choral students to church. Not because of any motivation to convert or proselytize, but because Mt. Washington Presbyterian Church, he says, “has a wonderful pipe organ, and it’s a wonderful sanctuary to sing in.”

Audiences familiar with NKU’s annual Celebration of the Season have no doubt come to expect certain things. “They get to sing some carols, and they get to hear some music that inspires them, that gets them going,” Pennington says. “They sit in the sanctuary that’s already decorated, that reflects the spirit of Christmas, they can get kind of going and think about other things as opposed to just shopping for gifts.”

While audiences can certainly count on those same elements this year, Pennington promises some pleasing changes, particularly with the presence of his new conductor. “This is the first year with Katie Barton. She’s a very fine organist, and a very refined pianist, as well as a great singer. She’s just kind of the whole package. So I’m really delighted to have her there this year.”

Concert goers should expect to arrive early, as seats to this free event fill quickly. “It’s basically standing-room only,” Pennington says. In the spirit of the season, donations are accepted at the door.

Band Program Extends its Reach

“The Youth Sinfonia will be performing with [NKU Chamber Orchestra] on the 29th. And that’s the first collaboration that we’ve had, where they’ve actually been featured on a university program, which is a good first step.”

More information is available at musicprep.nku.edu/.

Preparatory Department

Positive changes are in the works for the NKU Preparatory Department—including a name change!

As of the fall 2011 semester, the department will be known as the NKU Community School of Music. Toni Sheffer, Director of Preparatory Music, explains. “We have been thinking of that for several years. A lot of people outside of our discipline do not understand what that ‘preparatory’ word means.” Sheffer also points out that the new branding will adhere to the idea of community which NKU strives to achieve.

Aside from rebranding the department, Sheffer talks about some new initiatives which will better prepare students for performance outside of their lessons.

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Alumni News

State Champion Beechgrove High School Band

NKU Music Alumni lead the Beechwood High School Band to State Championship Win

Eight NKU alumni led the Beechwood High School marching band to a Kentucky State Championship in Division Class A on Saturday, October 30th at the KMEA SMBC FINALS at Papa John’s Cardinal Stadium in Louisville. Beechwood advanced to the state competition as one of the 16 Division Class A semi-finalist Kentucky marching bands after earlier regional contests around the state. Placing second in the semi-finals, they advanced with the top four Division Class A bands to the state finals where they surged ahead to become State Champions.

The staff of this 2010 Kentucky State Division Class A Championship Band includes eight NKU Alumni consisting of Joe Craig - Director of Bands; Adam Proctor - Associate Director of Bands; Mike Johns and Nick Kelley - percussion staff; Michelle Gibbs, Chris Alverson, and Matt Chandler - band camp sectional staff; and Brian Brown – drill writer and part-time instructor. Four of these Department of Music graduates (Craig, Gibbs, Johns, and Kelley) are former recipients of the prestigious Corbett Scholarship.

We want to hear from you!

Alumni of the Northern Kentucky University Department of Music are part of the program for life, and we want to hear from you. Tell us about your life after graduation, whether it’s a musical or career accomplishment, a big move, or any other exciting news. Keep us in the loop!

How can you submit your information? Easy!
By email: davisj21@nku.edu
By phone: (859) 572-6399
By mail: Music Office
Northern Kentucky University
Fine Arts 253
Nunn Drive
Highland Heights, KY 41099
Schedule of Events

Dec. 2 — “From Russia with Love” 8:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

Dec. 6 — NKU Steel Drum Band 8:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

Dec. 7 — Vocal Jazz @ Home 8:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

Dec. 8 — Celebration of the Season 7:30 p.m.
Mt. Washington Presbyterian Church

Dec. 9 — “Santa Claus Learns to Swing!” 8:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

Dec. 13 — “An American Symphony” 8:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

Dec. 18 — Northern Kentucky Children’s Ensemble Holiday Concert 1:00 p.m.
Cathedral Basilica

Dec. 18 — Music Preparatory Department Strings 2:00 p.m.
and 4:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

Jan. 22 — Tri-State Band Symposium 3:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

Jan. 22 — Northern Kentucky Youth Sinfonia CSO Pre-Concert Performance 7:30 p.m.
Cincinnati’s Music Hall

Jan. 26 — Symphonic Winds and Bassoon Ensemble 8:00 p.m.
Greaves Concert Hall

DECEMBER 2010

JANUARY 2011
Nota Bene

Northern Kentucky University's Department of Music offers a full range of performance and education opportunities to music majors. Our graduates pursue successful careers as professional performers, college and university faculty, public school music teachers, private studio instructors and in allied fields within the music industry. Our students have been accepted for graduate study at such renowned institutions as the Juilliard School, Indiana University–Bloomington, The San Francisco Conservatory of Music, University of

This issue of Nota Bene was designed and edited by Jen Davis

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Nota Bene is a great way for students and alumni to advertise their talents and services—for free! Send us your information (instrument, band or ensemble name, contact information, etc.) and we'll feature it here in the Talent Connection! Each issue of Nota Bene reaches over 1000 people. You never know where your next gig will come from!

Talent Connection

Photo courtesy of Kurt Sander

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