

UNION SYMPHONY SOCIETY, INC.

Junior Guild Journal

JG

Leadership and Enrichment For Music Students of Greater Union County

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An Interview With USYO Conductor Mekel Rogers

On January 9, 2010, USYO conductor Mekel Rogers gave us these responses to our previously asked interview questions.

(Q) What instrument would you say is your primary instrument? How old were you when you first started playing an instrument?

(A) Horn is my primary instrument. I actually started on trumpet in 5th grade way back in 1982. I moved over to horn two years later.

(Q) What types of music were your early influences?

(A) My father owned a recording studio in Charlotte and so music was always in the house growing up. Mom and Dad loved the music of the 1960s, especially beach, rock, and folk music. I remember being attracted to the vocal harmonies of the Beach Boys and the Beatles. My first real exposure to Art Music came from watching Andre Watts play Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto with the New York Philharmonic and thinking that I needed to get into this more

(Q) Who is your favorite composer, and why?

(A) Beethoven, no question. No single person has had more of an influence on the evolution of music than he. His music represents heroism, struggle, humanism, and free thought. Its is unbelievably artistic and complex yet still very accessible to the novice listener. Add to that he had an extraordinary life of hardship, triumph, suffering, love, heartbreak, perseverance, and disability.

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A Dance between Two Forms of Expression

By Kristina Drye

There are many forms of art- music, paint, sculpture, dance, literature- and each one of these holds its own place in society as something of importance to our culture. Each one can- and has- functioned on its own as a way to impress, to inspire, to invigorate. It is a rare occasion where two or more of these art forms- each so unique on their own- can be brought together into a production where the sum is greater than its parts. One example of such an anomaly is the time-honored ballet, the Nutcracker. With music written by Russian-born Tchaikovsky and dance that is shaped from an old folk tale, this ballet is indeed greater than the sum of its smaller parts. With each note the conductor signals, a pointe shoe moved in conjunction. With each mellow draw of a bow, an arm gracefully curves in a delicate duet with the music. The Nutcracker was so much more than simply a girl living her dream on a solitary Christmas night; it was a dance, indeed, between two distinctive forms of expression, molded and tied together in an inexplicable manner that can only be captured in such a way as it was in this ballet.



Union Symphony Jazz Ensemble Update

By Ben Keoseyan

The Union Symphony Jazz

Ensemble (USJE) is a community jazz band that meets roughly every other Sunday at the Loft, 200 North Main Street, in Downtown Monroe. US Junior Guild President and accomplished jazz bass player Tim Singh and Principal Trumpet player of the USYO and jazz trumpet player Ben Keoseyan lead the band instrumentalist with at least 2 years of

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An Interview with USYO Conductor Mekel Rogers

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(Q) What are you looking for in music when you select pieces for USYO?

(A) I look for music that is challenging but can be cleaned for a great performance. I look for a variety of styles and time periods that will engage the students and please the listener. I look for music that highlights the strengths of the orchestra.

(Q) What do you enjoy most about working with young musicians?

(A) Young musicians who work hard are just so much fun to be around. All of that energy youth has is channeled into something positive and creative. It's a very special relationship that isn't there with most other kids.

(Q) What do you think are the best ways to expose students to classical music?

(A) Saturate their world with it. Listen to recordings, go to live performances, play it, sing it, write it. Art Music isn't just for the rich, the old, or the learned. It's for everybody.

(Q) What do you see as a problem concerning today's students and music?

(A) Unfortunately, most students today (and adults) only listen to music on a sensual level and therefore only pick up on very basic elements of music such as volume, repetition, and tune. People who listen with a more engaged brain can look past the basics and find what's really there, whether it be formal structure, motive development, tonal progression, instrumental texture, or thematic contrast. It is these elements that engage the higher levels of the brain, liberate the spirit, and make great music great.

(Q) Do you have any advice for music students?

(A) There is no substitute for hard work. Talent is a nice thing to have but its useless without a strong work ethic. Reaching higher means making yourself uncomfortable.

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 in improvisational jazz. The band is for any experience on most instruments, specifically saxophone, trumpet, trombone, drum set, piano, bass, and guitar.

To prepare for rehearsals practice ALL major and minor scales and LISTEN to other jazz musicians. There is an unlimited amount of live jazz performances on YouTube. You can find a great list of videos by searching terms such as ‘Miles Davis’, ‘John Coltrane’, and ‘Charlie Parker’ in the search bar. It is also recommended that you purchase How to Play Jazz and Improvise by Jamey Aebersold. It is an immense source of information and tips on learning the basics of jazz style and technique.

Last December, we performed at the Monroe Christmas Tree Lighting in Downtown Monroe. “It was a pretty good gig and a good crowd”, says bandleader and bass player Tim Singh. We performed for a large crowd and had our music broadcasted from speakers all throughout Main Street. We are looking forward to play at many more gigs this season including the Spring Art Walk at the Loft.

The next Jazz Ensemble Rehearsal is on March 14, from 2- 4 PM at the Loft in Downtown Monroe. All instruments are welcome. The performers will alternate on songs. Electric and acoustic guitar and bass are welcome.

Jazz Recreated

by Alyssa Jones
 Have you ever heard a string quartet play John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" or "A Love Supreme"? You might be thinking "That's never going to exist!" Well, on January 22, the Turtle Island String Quartet performed both of those formerly "non-string quartet- playable" songs and more. Not only did they entertain several members of the Junior Guild with their diverse range of sounds, they also stole the breath of the audience,

easily playing complex parts. On a scale of one to ten, the Turtle Island String Quartet is clearly an eleven! Listening to their jazz was like listening to jazz being recreated.



Junior Guild Members Austin Neese, Paul Norwood, Marianna Norwood, Amy Solka, Jamie Benfield, and Lester St. Louis pose with the Turtle Island String Quartet 1

January Melodies

by Olivia George

Brahms, Beethoven, Mendelssohn... I wish they could have heard us Monday night! With eight (long☺) rehearsals finally paying off, I would say our concert was a great success. The evening was filled with many emotions as families gathered in the Porter Ridge High School auditorium to listen to a variety of students coming together to make music. I'm sure people were pleased to hear us play "Jesu Joy of Mans' Desiring" twice with the melodic sounds of the harps ending the piece. (Great job Julia van Patter and Leah Reeder) The Heaven and Nature Sing Art exhibit was a success raising over \$700. Rounding off the evening, families were treated to punch, coffee, and delicious cakes! Thanks to everyone who took the time to make that Monday night an experience hopefully no one forgets!

Don't Miss ...
 Union Symphony Youth Orchestra performing with the Union Symphony @ Marvin Ridge High School on March 27 at 7:30 PM