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# The Penguin

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New England Conservatory

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## **An Opposite Perspective: Non-Musicians and Their Role in the Future of Classical Music**

### **Part I: The Evolution of the "Classical Music Perception"**

*By Zach Preucil*

*This article is the first in a two-part series on the perspective of non-musicians. Part I focuses on the evolution and implications of how non-musicians perceive the classical music world and classical music itself as a result of cultural constructions and performance practices; Part II (to be published in the December issue) will focus on how understanding the perspective of the non-musician can allow us to best engage them and ultimately serve the musical and intellectual desires of twenty-first century culture.*

"My goodness, did you have to buy a seat for that?"

I look up to see a bemused woman looking down at my cello, which I have just strapped into the seat beside me on our idling Boeing 747 airplane.

"Yeah," I nod. "It's very fragile, and you just can't risk checking it."

"Gee," she exclaims, plopping into the seat on my other side. "So you got it through security without any problems?"

"Er—mostly," I tell her; my heart is still returning to a normal speed following some tense moments when the TSA agents working the x-ray machine mistook the rosin dust on my fingerboard for gunpowder.

She nods and reaches for her complimentary copy of *Sky Mall*, and I wonder if that will be the extent of our conversation. I sigh and look out the small plane window, settling in for another flight from Boston to my hometown of Chicago. It's just past dusk on a frigid December evening, and the tarmac of Logan Airport is illuminated by glowing multicolored lights, almost causing one to think that it had been decorated for Christmas.

"So how long have you been playing?" my seat mate inquires; apparently, *Sky Mall's* cover story on Captain "Sully" Sullenberger isn't enough to distract her from the presence of my fellow passenger.

"Since I was five," I tell her. "And now I'm a student at the New England Conservatory."

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## ***"Music taught me that life has many rhythms, time for everything, keys to creativity."***

### **Stories From the Abreu Fellows' Journeys**

*By Jennifer Kessler*

In the October issue of *The Penguin*, Abreu Fellows Aisha Bowden and Stephanie Hsu shared an overview of El Sistema as a practice of music education for social change as well as a philosophy of community building. Their portrayal of participating in the African American Roots Ensemble captured the essence of El Sistema values: creating a fun and inviting space where "the power of each individual voice...contribute [s] to a larger and more beautiful collective sound."

Since last month, the Abreu Fellows have embarked on multiple journeys to create and participate in collaborative projects that build a similar sense of a community as that found in a music ensemble. Some of you may have seen us around, asking for your participation in one project or another. Here's the grand overview!

#### Projects at NEC

##### **The Inside Out Group Action Boston Project**

Remember when you were cornered last month by ebullient Abreu Fellows asking to take your picture? Inspired by artist and TED winner JR's goal to "discover, reveal, and share the untold stories and images of people around the world," the Abreu Fellows formed an Inside Out Group Action Project with musicians from the NEC community to explore the theme "Music Can Change the World." The purpose of our Inside Out Group Action Project is to highlight musicians who actively make a difference in their communities through photographs.

*Fellows continued on page 2*

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On October 3, 2011, the Fellows asked students, faculty, and staff of the NEC community, as well as other musicians in Boston, to have their photographs taken. Each person who was photographed submitted a statement about the meaning of music in their lives or how they use music in their communities. Some of the statements included:

“Music taught me that life has many rhythms, time for everything, keys to creativity.”

“Music is healing and a source of revitalization to people's spirits.”

“Music helps us transcend and open up to what life can bring us each day.”

At the time of publication, over 40 NEC students have had their picture taken and have shared their individual story about the impact of music in their lives. This exchange among NEC students – talking about the greater purpose of music and how it can be used to elevate communities – established new relationships and rich conversations within the NEC community, and connected NEC students to other Inside Out Group Action projects around the world.

The photographs and statements will be uploaded to the Inside Out Project website ([www.insideoutproject.net](http://www.insideoutproject.net)). Stay tuned for updates about where else you may see these photographs.

### **Making Music at NEC**

Fellow Avi Mehta recently led 22 brass and percussion players in his arrangement of the funeral march from Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*. The ensemble was comprised of both NEC students and community members, and was presented on October 27 at the *Mahler Remixed* concert organized by the Entrepreneurial Music department.

### Projects in the Boston community

#### **The Boston Arts Academy Senior Grant Projects**

The Abreu Fellows and other fellow NEC musicians have been collaborating with Boston Arts Academy (BAA), the city's only public high school dedicated to the visual and performing arts. (Fun Fact: Linda Nathan, The Founding Headmaster of BAA, visited El Sistema in Venezuela with a team of NEC administrators and was involved in the formation process of the Abreu Fellows Program!) These students truly are artistic and social visionaries with much to teach us.

The BAA seniors are charged with developing Senior Grant Projects, in which they design and propose projects that apply their artistic media toward impacting social change in their communities. For example, one student is applying for funding to design an interactive musical and multimedia workshop to educate her BAA peers on issues faced by undocumented immigrants face in the U.S. We had the opportunity to mentor some of these young leaders, and it has been a powerful mutual learning process for all of us involved. The types of questions BAA students are asking themselves beautifully parallel the questions we are asking ourselves in our non-profit strategy seminar about the El-Sistema-inspired programs we plan to design and run.

#### **Presentation at Harvard University**

In a rare opportunity to broaden the dialogue about music for social change, the current Fellows and 2011 Fellow Marie Montilla gave a presentation on El Sistema at Harvard University. As part of the Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership study group on “Arts and Leadership,” the fellows joined students and faculty from cross-disciplines in a conversation about how principles from El Sistema fit into discussions on development in the US.

The highlight was undoubtedly when the 10 fellows brought about 40 people – many of whom had no experience with music – singing and harmonizing together in the lobby of Harvard's Kennedy School. No better way than singing to experience the values of “El Sistema:” fun, excellence, performance, and community-building.

### Projects outside of Boston

#### **Internships**

This month, the Fellows are taking what they've learned this year in non-profit strategy, best teaching practices, and presentation skills as a lens to observe El Sistema programs around the country and abroad. From Alaska to Scotland, the Fellows will delve into the work of El Sistema-inspired programs on the ground. We look forward to sharing with you what we see and experience while we're away and when we come back. If you'd like to follow our individual journeys, please visit our blogs by way of the NEC site: <http://necmusic.edu/nec-announces-2011-12-abreu-fellows>



*Jennifer Kessler is a 2011-2012 Abreu Fellow. Send questions or comments about this article to [Jennifer.Kessler@necmusic.edu](mailto:Jennifer.Kessler@necmusic.edu).*

## Liberal Arts Events!

Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> – 8pm, Pierce Hall  
Xenakis and His Legacy: Conference

Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> – 8pm, Brown Hall  
Xenakis and His Legacy

Nov. 13<sup>th</sup> – 8pm, Jordan Hall  
Tutti Celli

Nov. 15<sup>th</sup> – 7pm, Williams Hall  
Frans Helmerson Masterclass

8pm, Jordan Hall  
The Aura of Mahler

Nov. 16<sup>th</sup> – 8pm, Jordan Hall  
Philharmonia + Biss

Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> – 8pm, Jordan Hall  
Mahler as Arranger

Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> – 8:30pm, Brown Hall  
NEC Lab Orchestra + Student Conductors

8:30pm, Williams Hall  
Undergraduate Opera Scenes

Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> – 8pm, Williams Hall  
Undergraduate Opera Scenes

Nov. 20<sup>th</sup> – 7:30pm, Jordan Hall  
NEC Percussion Ensemble + Epstein

Nov. 21<sup>st</sup> – 8pm, Jordan Hall  
NEC Jordan Winds + Drury

8pm, Brown Hall  
NEC Jazz Composers Ensemble

Nov. 28<sup>th</sup> – 8pm, Jordan Hall  
The Borromeo String Quartet

Nov. 29<sup>th</sup> – 1pm, Pierce Hall  
Jason Moran Masterclass

7pm, Jordan Hall  
Mahler in Chinatown

Nov. 30<sup>th</sup> – 1:30pm, Pierce Hall  
Mahler as Interpreter; Mahler as Interpreted

7:30pm, Jordan Hall  
Music by Mahler, Inspired by Mahler, Re-  
touched by Mahler

**Pierce Hall Jazz Series: November 14th,  
15th, 16th, 17th, 28th, 29th, and 30th at 7  
PM**

### Guests Lecturers in Liberal Arts Classes this Spring

The Liberal Arts Department will be hosting several guest lecturers this spring to enrich students' academic experience and foster intellectual engagement at NEC. These events will take place during classes and are intended to complement students' ongoing studies, but members of the NEC community are welcome to visit these special events.

We've already had two guests this semester: poet and literary critic **Elizabeth Willis** visited Ruth Lepson's **Poetry Workshop** on October 20 to read and discuss her poetry with the class. Willis' most recent book, *Address*, was published by Wesleyan University Press in 2011. **Judy Braha**, a well-known director, teacher, actor, and arts advocate and the head of the MFA Directing Program at Boston University, visited Patrick Keppel's **Origins and History of Drama** class on October 27 to discuss the B.U. student production of Lynn Nottage's prize-winning play, *Intimate Apparel*, which the Origins class attended at the B.U. Theatre's Studio 210.

Dates and times for the following upcoming guests will be announced in an email to all NEC students this spring:

Poet **Brenda Ijima** will be visiting Ruth Lepson's **Contemporary American Poetry**. Ijima has edited an anthology of ecopoetry, the ecolanguage reader, and will concentrate on that work as well as reading her own poetry in her appearance at NEC. She is writing an informal encyclopedia on animals used as surrogates by humans. Ijima is also the editor of Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs and a visual artist as well as a poet. Her books of poems include *Around Sea*; *Animate*, *Inanimate Aims*; *revv.you'll—ution*; and *If Not Metamorphic*.

**William Mayer**, Associate Professor of Political Science at Northeastern University, will be visiting James Klein's **The Presidential Campaign: Party Politics in the 21st Century**. Professor Mayer has written and lectured on the politics of presidential elections for almost three decades. In such works as *In Pursuit of the White House*, *The Swing Voter*, and *The Making of Presidential Candidates*, he has explored the new, entrepreneurial campaigns emerging out of the protest politics of the 1960s, as well as the expanding role of money and celebrity in the modern presidential election cycle.

**Advanced Seminar: The Civil Rights Movement: The Era that Transformed America**, also taught by James Klein, will be visited by **Vivian Johnson**, Professor Emeritus at Boston University's School of Education. Professor Johnson has written and lectured on virtually every aspect of contemporary life, from the microcosm of neighborhood schools to the international questions of African government. Her participation in the Civil Rights movement, her interest in Boston history, and her analysis of cross cultural diversity – on both a social and personal level – have made her a valuable resource to the Boston community.



"Wow!" she nods, her eyes wide. "You must be really good!"

"Oh, well—it takes a while to master it," I respond, abandoning all thought of attempting to convince her just how much work it takes to play an instrument at the highest level.

"So what types of jobs will you have?" she presses on, marking her page in *Sky Mall*. "Will you play in an orchestra?"

"Well, there's more opportunities for orchestral positions," I explain. "But it's pretty tough. I mean, you get like two hundred people showing up for one spot."

"Wow," she shakes her head. "And I thought it was tough making it as an accountant."

"But there's chamber music, too," I say quickly. "Although it's pretty hard to make a living doing just that. You have to really establish your group, and even then you'll most definitely have to supplement what money you make with teaching and other gigs."

"Gee," she says again, glancing back down at the *Sky Mall*. "Well, you must really love it if you're willing to go through all of that."

"I do," I say earnestly.

She looks up from the *Sky Mall* for a second, her eyes suddenly filled with wonder and imagination, and for the first time in our conversation she seems to understand me: to understand the passion for music which sustains me in spite of the many obstacles that threaten to blockade my path. But now the flight attendants are motioning for our attention up at the front for the usual pre-flight briefing, and after we're through with that the cabin lights are dimmed, and I feel the familiar rumble of the airplane's engines beneath my shoes as we begin to taxi out onto the luminescent runway. It seems as though my conversation with my inquisitive seat mate has ended, and my suspicions are confirmed as she removes her spectacles and closes her eyes, evidently hoping to use the two-hour flight back to Chicago to catch up on some much-needed sleep. But I stay awake, looking out the window as we soar at 40,000 feet above the eastern United States, watching the twinkling lights of cities and dark rural landscapes fade in and out beneath wisps of navy clouds, and reflecting on the conversation I have just had. It is so interesting, I think to myself, that because I am usually in an environment where I'm surrounded by fellow musicians, an interaction with a non-musician is so refreshing — and, ultimately, enlightening.

As the plane speeds westward into the dark December night, I wonder if it's a perspective we need to have more often.

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Who are the non-musicians? Such a person would essentially be defined as someone without any formal musical training, which makes them everyone from the driver of the T to Barack Obama. They know about classical music, of course, but it's in the same category with everything else they've "heard about" — like Shakespeare, for instance — but have never become very interested in. If you asked a random person on the street what they knew about Shakespeare, they might be able to rattle off "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet," or perhaps "to be or not to be." And if you asked that same person what they knew about classical music, they'd probably come up with "Yo-Yo Ma," "Mozart," and "Juilliard." But that would be about it. They wouldn't be able to tell you that Mozart was in the "classical period" or that Juilliard is in fact not the most competitive conservatory in the world, just as they wouldn't be able to explain how by the end of *Hamlet*, Hamlet actually realizes that he's in a play. All that they know about classical music and Shakespeare is what culture has sucked out of them and embedded in its lexicon. Thus, the way in which non-musicians perceive classical music is essentially what culture has constructed it to be: an elitist, formal event only understood by snobby intellectuals dressed in stuffy white suits. I got a taste of this reflected cultural perception this past summer while I was working in the office of a chamber music festival. From the first day, the executive director implored me to not mention the word, "chamber music" to callers inquiring as to the genre of the concerts.

"You must instead tell them that it's 'classical music in an intimate setting,'" she told me firmly.

"But why?" I asked, incredulous.

"You want the truth?" she responded. "Sometimes, when I tell them it's chamber music, they hang up!"

To begin to understand the perspective of the non-musician, we must first understand the origins of this cultural construction. At its inception, classical music was performed in the courts of European kings and queens, implying a necessity for all aspects of it to be extremely formal. Even as the centuries progressed and the venues in which music was performed expanded enormously, it still retained that element of formality, creating an impression that in order to experience it you had to have some sort of undefined pre-requisite for doing so - or at least put on a nice pair of pants. With the advent of modern technology, social progress, and rapidly expanding genres of popular music in the twentieth century, the formality of a classical music experience began to alienate prospective audience members. Why go through all the effort of attempting to blend in with the aristocracy when you could quench your musical thirsts simply by cranking up the victrola and listening to Elvis Presley's latest hit? I think a lot of people must have been asking themselves that question (or something like it, anyways), because the term "music" in popular culture became associated more and more with the Beatles and less with Beethoven (nothing against the Beatles, of course).

This is not to say that all non-musicians have minimal interest in classical music; on the contrary, the majority of audiences are comprised of them. Outside of a major city or culturally-rich area where professional musicians are typically employed, the classical musician demographic makes up an extremely small percentage of a given audience. As a result, the performance is actually changed, because a "performance" can be defined as being comprised of four largely intangible entities: the composer's inspiration, the composer's resulting work, the realization of the work by the performers, and the listener's perception of the work. The actual music and its realization by the performers serves to transmit the composer's inspiration to the listener, and the way in which the listener is affected by this transmission has a profound impact on the performance as a whole. Of course, this interpretation of the concept of a performance is largely metaphysical, because how the listener perceives the music doesn't actually effect how the music *sounds* - but the complete experience is, in effect, changed. It is entirely possible for two people to leave a concert hall with completely different impressions of the same performance, sometimes as a result of their individual tastes and present emotional states, but many times because of a difference in musical knowledge. A professional musician will notice if a performer does not employ subtle nuances in their realization of a work, but a non-musician will not, because they simply do not realize the potential of how high a level the music can be played.

Non-musicians are drawn to three things in a classical music performance: the depth of emotion conveyed, impressive technical feats, and the piece itself. If a piece is performed with bravura and emotion, the first violinist zooms over their fingerboard at the speed of light, and the piece in question is the Tchaikovsky Sextet for Strings, any audience will leap to its feet at the performance's conclusion. But if the same piece is played by a group of orchestra musicians on jet lag, and as a result there's barely any energy and the first violinist has some epic fails during the fourth movement, there's a very good chance that an audience composed primarily of non-musicians will leap to its feet anyways. We can all recall performances where we walked onstage with our knees knocking and didn't play our best, but were still engulfed with fervent praise from our entourage of Aunt Meg, friends from work, and the lady next door, all of whom who genuinely believed it was a great performance. Can such a performance still be considered successful? From the definition of a "performance" as the actual execution of musical notation, it cannot. But from the definition of a performance as a metaphysical entity where the perception of the listener is a critical part of the equation, it can be.

All metaphysics aside, it is of equal importance to consider the fact that the way in which we present a concert can alter the non-musicians' perception of it. If a string quartet goes out and plays Schubert's famous *Death and Maiden*, bows, and walks off, the audience will enjoy it for sure; but if the first violinist of the quartet stands up and explains how the piece was inspired by a song Schubert wrote, the theme of which appears in the second movement, and that its meaning can be interpreted on multiple layers considering Schubert wrote it when he was dying of syphilis and it was in fact not published until after his death, the audience is going to be much more interested. Not only do they now have things to listen for in what was previously an unknown and potentially overwhelming piece, they have ample material to gossip about on the T ride home ("and here I always thought Schubert was a clean-cut, well-to-do Christian man!").

Furthermore, a non-musician's perception of a performance is also informed by how good they are *told* the performers are. I remember my mother, who is a professional violinist, once telling me how an ad in the newspaper for a recital she was playing mistakenly stated that she had won the silver medal in the Tchaikovsky competition, when the winner was in fact her teacher. As a result, the hall was packed to the capacity with excited audience members, eager to feast their auditory senses on this apparent rising star. Even if a performance is not as high-level as it is made out to be, non-musicians will still think it is, because they won't be able to tell if the subtleties are there or not. If the performer's bio sounds impressive, or contains any of the "cultural symbols" associated with "good" musicians, then the performance is perceived to be good no matter what. Thus, it can be reasonably stated that the perception of our performances are partly within our control. Again, this doesn't actually affect how the performance sounds; but, again, it contributes to our understanding of the non-musicians' perspective.

In sum, it can be concluded that the unchanging performance practices of classical music in the present day have created a cultural construction that either alienates non-musicians or essentially, creates more of them; that a non-musician's perception of a performance is informed by a variety of factors both within and beyond our control as performers; and that on multiple levels, this perception has a great impact on the performance itself. With this perspective in mind, the next mission in our quest to understand the role of the non-musician is to define who we really are and what's really going on in a performance - and discover how we can best engage the minds and hearts of our non-musical counterparts to ultimately become engaged with the incessantly spinning threads of twenty-first century culture. In the next installment of this series, we will examine how we define ourselves and what our potential is - and ultimately, the steps we must take to tap into our greatest resource: the non-musicians.



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## **You Know You Go To NEC When...**

*Compiled by Jason Belcher*

The following quotes are from current NEC students and recent alumni. If you would like to contribute, please email Jason at [jason.belcher@necmusic.edu](mailto:jason.belcher@necmusic.edu).

- ⇒ When you walk into Jordan Hall, and you hear, "Hey (insert name here), can I see your ID?"
- ⇒ You walk out of Jordan, and you aren't surprised to see and hear a man hanging out his apartment window with a karaoke machine.
- ⇒ Your stand partner, solfège tutor, and Firestone co-worker are all the same person: your ex.
- ⇒ You want to switch things up this weekend but you know you're gonna end up at Uno's again.
- ⇒ No matter who is playing, all you can think is how much better it would sound in Jordan Hall.
- ⇒ Registering for classes online seems like a foreign concept to you.
- ⇒ Blackboard is that usually green thing hanging up in a classroom and not a technology tool.
- ⇒ You have a Facebook friend who asks for punchlines to the set-up "you know you go to NEC when:"
- ⇒ You use Beethoven as a geological reference point.
- ⇒ You go to a Northeastern party, and realize nobody knows who your teacher is
- ⇒ You get most of your daily exercise just by trying to find a practice room.
- ⇒ You strategize your visits to the computer lab by thinking of the best way divide your print jobs to increments of 15 pages per visit.
- ⇒ When walking into the bistro to get food is an experience that is more akin to walking into a top-security barricaded banking facility.
- ⇒ It's only your Junior year but you're already spending most of your time looking for an apartment in Brooklyn for after you graduate.
- ⇒ When forming study groups means gathering at your friend's house to meditate together for your Liberal Arts elective in Buddhist Philosophy, only to fail because you got pwn'ed by jet plane flyovers at the nearby Red Sox playoff game.

## Wilco—*The Whole Love*

by Neal Markowski

*The record starts. There's something that sounds like a broken drum machine. After a stuttering beat, the sound of strings swells in. Crap, did I just buy the new Radiohead album by accident? I don't know if I can dig this for much longer – oh wait, it stops. And then it starts again, this time with a song in here.*

So begins Wilco's latest album, *The Whole Love*, the third album with this line-up (something of a record for them), and the first one where it feels like they are actually experimenting with sounds again. The first from the group, *Sky Blue Sky*, had the kids yelling "DAD ROCK! DAD ROCK!" The second, *Wilco (The Album)*, just sounded like some pop songs, but not really like a cohesive statement. Sure, they were good songs, but where was the noisy stuff? And what about the rest of the band? Did Jeff Tweedy forget that he has Nels Cline playing in the band? . However, on *The Whole Love*, this is no longer an issue. Nels and the rest of the band, are embracing those crazy noises all the kids love while still writing good songs. And it's about time.

The first track most listeners heard from this album was the song "I Might." This may have been a reference to "I'll Fight" from the last album, but the similarities only lied in the titles. "I Might" featured a chugging beat, noisy guitar, a fuzzed-out bass and all kinds of crazy baseball organ sounds. As I drove home from work this summer and this jam came on 'XRT, I remember thinking "Hey, I actually might like this Wilco album at first listen!" And it was true! If you're a friend of mine on Facebook, you would have seen my "live review" of the album, meaning that as I listened to it, I posted my thoughts on a friends' Facebook page at some random hours of the night. To help make this review more entertaining, here are some bullet points that I made while listening to the album.

- "This part of the song sounds like a Lunchables commercial" ("Dawned on Me")
- "Becoming a winter album now..." ("Black Moon")
- "This year's "Kamera"?" ("Born Alone")
- "Oh that's a cool part" ("Open Mind")
- "Sounds like some Randy Newman stuff" ("Capitol City")
- "KICK IN THE ROCK PANTS!" ("Standing O")
- "The drums on this album sound good" ("The Whole Love")
- "Let the 14 minute epics rip" ("One Sunday Morning")
- "Where's the jams?" ("One Sunday Morning")
- "When does this thing just explode into 100000 pieces?" ("One Sunday Morning")
- "No real noise screechin', but still a solid record" ("One Sunday Morning")

Sure, these notes are a bit silly, but the fact is that I still stand by these observations (even though the "Lunchables" thing is a bit harsh.) "Standing O" is as good as a rock song as "I'm a Wheel" . It also sounds like They Might Be Giants with that organ in there (yep, I went there.)

"Dawned on Me" is quite possibly one of the best Wilco songs of the past decade. It has everything – some noisy stuff, whistling – relatively "feelin' good" music. Like "Dawned on Me", "The Whole Love" is a track that features something for everybody. And one cannot speak or write on this album without mentioning the closing track "One Sunday Morning (Song for Jane Smiley's Boyfriend)." For close to 8 minutes, the track goes around and around. And let's be clear – there isn't any motorik beat holding it all together, or 12 minutes of sine waves, or any other sort of self-indulgence. Instead, it

proves to be a very nice and well-written song, the last 4 instrumental minutes acting as a nice coda for this fantastic album.

A few months ago, Jeff Tweedy stated in an interview that there would be some *Tonight's the Night* style songs and some 14 minute long one. Well, nothing on here really sounds like *Tonight's the Night*, but in all honesty, I'm fine with that. With this album, Wilco has crafted their finest since *A Ghost is Born*, which probably makes it their third best (in my book at least), and certainly one of the great records of 2011.



Neal Markowski is a junior composition major. Send comments and questions about this article to [Neal.Markowski@necmusic.edu](mailto:Neal.Markowski@necmusic.edu). Visit his blog at <http://recordreviewandtacosalon.blogspot.com>.

Join our staff in meetings every Monday  
at 6 P.M. in Bistro 33!



# Ask Emmy!

Dear Emmy,

How can I get my name out there in a completely alien musical environment? How do I advertise myself and make connections?

From,

Making Connections

Dear Making Connections,

I'm glad you wrote in with this question, because I know it's one that a lot of students are mulling. It can be daunting—on top of making great music, you've got to build audiences and support for your work. These days, there's a lot of digital noise, but I would still say that one of the great advantages of the Internet is that it allows us to connect with individuals and communities based on shared interests instead of shared geography. Getting your "name out there" in an alien environment is what the Internet is all about.

The first step is building a web presence. A website, today, is like a business card. It's a baseline tool that you'll need to build a network of supporters. Your website should deliver an engaging picture of who you are and the music you make. I won't get into the particulars of DIY websites for artists here, but I will say that a simple, free website is much, much better than no website at all. I know many young artists shy away from building websites because they don't feel ready to showcase their work. Again, a pretty good impression is better than no impression at all. As a student, you're already involved in so many interesting, high level performances and projects. Capture that work and use it to build your website. And, have fun with it—marketing is inherently creative work—it's all about employing images, words and other media to tell stories. No one knows your story better than you do.

A website alone won't "get your name out there," so the next step is figuring out how to drive people to your online island. Social media can be a powerful marketing tool—using Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube and the like will certainly help you direct traffic to your website. I just recently hopped on to the Twitter bandwagon and I have been amazed at how easy it can be to connect with key players in your field, with just a little twitter banter. I know that managing a multi-layered online presence can be time consuming, so my advice would be this: figure out what appeals to you most and zoom in. If Twitter feels exciting to you, then really explore that platform and use it regularly to build an online community. If you're a great writer and love chronicling your work, well then, get blogging. If video is your medium, make a YouTube channel and start shooting. These platforms obviously work best in tandem, but at this stage, I would say making a mark somewhere and starting to connect to your online voice is the most important step.

This topic is too big to wrangle in 500 words, but I'll close with this final observation: no amount of tweeting, facebook status updating, YouTube posting etc. can all together replace face-time. I think online connections are often prompted or at least supported by real world connections and associations. So you're right to include "making connections" in your question. Music making is an inherently collaborative endeavor, so wherever you're based, you'll naturally build connections with other musicians. That's the first step. Then, get clear on what your objectives are (booking a gig, starting a project, getting a job etc.) and who the right people are to get you closer to your goal. Start reaching out to the people in your network and see how you might be able to get connected to those key individuals. Your network is a lot more robust than you think. Family, friends, and teachers are all part of your extended network and they in turn are plugged in to other networks. If you're feeling anxious about this process, just remember that the people you want to meet with--presenters, arts administrators, venue managers, publicists, journalists, artist managers etc.--are in this field because they too love music. If you're open, respectful, and curious, I think you'll find that the "key individuals" will welcome meeting a young artist who is engaged and looking to contribute. This is a life-long process, and the act of "making connections" will only get easier as you progress along in your career.

I've really just scratched the surface in this piece. I'd encourage you to visit my friends in the EM office, Making Connections, to continue this important conversation.

Yours,

M



Emmy, or "M," is a fixture of the NEC community. Send your questions or comments to [Ask.M@necmusic.edu](mailto:Ask.M@necmusic.edu).

## Roaming Lesson

*A poem by Julia Partyka*

Sitting outside  
In front of a window  
Starring blatantly into a distance  
Common knowledge and inquisitive questions  
In intervals, simple  
It can't be.  
Clear head, be present  
Thoughts meander to their aiming target  
All is upon its surface

Lying there  
Swish, cool breeze  
Summer, where?  
Nothing but a chilled night.  
Gesture, do I know this?  
The wise men says,  
You may comprehend but until it falls into your lap,  
The lesson will not be learned.



*Julia Partyka is a junior vocal performance major.  
Send questions or comments about this poem to  
Julia..Partyka@necmusic.edu.*



*The Penguin staff  
wishes you all a  
Happy Thanksgiving!*

***Want to see your name here?***

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