

The Penguin

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New England Conservatory

Issue XV

Can You Smell the Molasses?

by Siri Bloom

After living in Boston for two years, I have seen a good share of the historical places around the city. I have walked the Freedom Trail, visited Harvard University, and gained the knowledge of an amateur tour guide by taking Professor Klein's History of Boston seminar. But the thing that I love about this city is there is always a new story to hear, a new fact to discover. One of these is a story that seems to have been forgotten by modern generations, and seemed almost comical to me when I first heard it. Can you imagine a flood of molasses? It sounds like something that would fit into a lighthearted children's book, but it was a real tragedy for the city following World War I.

What is now known as the Boston Molasses Disaster occurred on the grounds of the Purity Distilling Company, a manufacturing plant for alcohol used for ingestion and ammunition, located on Commercial Street in the North End. One of the key ingredients the plant needed was fermented molasses, so the company had a tank 50 ft. high and 90 ft. wide able to hold 2,300,000 gallons of molasses. January 15, 1919 was an abnormally warm day at 43°F; just three days before the temperature was barely above 0°F. Many employees of the plant were enjoying the weather by shedding their heavy coats and spending their lunch break outside. Unfortunately, the beautiful day turned deadly when the molasses tank collapsed.

According to witnesses, the ground began to shake and the popping rivets of the tank sounded like a machine gun. When the tank broke open, it unleashed a wave of hot, sticky molasses out onto the city streets at a speed of 35 mph with a pressure of 2 tons per square foot. The initial height of the wave was between 8 and 15 feet, but left between 2-3 feet of standing molasses blocks away from the tank. Many people responded to the disaster including the Boston Fire and Police Departments, nurses from the Red Cross, and members of the Army and Navy. They searched the area for four days attempting to recover survivors and identify those who had perished. In all, 21 people and several horses were killed and 150 were injured.

The clean up of the disaster was a long one. It took months to clear streets, houses, and businesses of the molasses, which was now hardened into every possible crevice. Shortly after the accident, 119 lawsuits were filed against the United States Industrial Alcohol Company (USIA), the owners of the Purity Distilling Company. The case was enormous; 3,000 witnesses took the stand and 45,000 pages of testimony and arguments were recorded. Everyone wanted one question answered: what caused the tank to explode?

Many reasons for the explosion were brought to the court. The first, argued by the USIA, was that because they produced alcohol for ammunition, anarchists purposely set a bomb near the tank. That was quickly pushed aside, as more probable evidence

became available. It was discovered that Arthur Jell, the overseer of the construction of the tank, didn't adequately test the tank for safety and effectiveness. It was rarely checked for leaks, and when it did start to leak, the tank was painted brown to better hide the dripping molasses. That poor testing, the rise of the outside temperature, and strong probability that increased carbon dioxide raised the internal pressure in the tank were all deemed the cause of the disaster. The court ruled that the USIA pay \$1 million to the families of the deceased and injured, which would amount to about \$100 million today. The molasses tank was never rebuilt. The area is now a city park, and a baseball field stands on the site where the tank used to be.

Urban legend says that on hot summer days, the sweet smell of molasses fills the air of the North End. This event is just one small piece of Boston's vast intriguing history. I encourage you to take every opportunity to learn about the place in which you're currently living. The city's history doesn't stop at the end of the Freedom Trail; discover for yourself the stories that shaped what the city is today.



Siri Bloom is a junior oboe major. Send comments and questions about this article to siri.bloom@necmusic.edu

Notes on Inter-Departmental Collaboration

by Jason Belcher

Hello, welcome, and welcome back. As you're reading this, you're probably getting acquainted with brand new surroundings, or gawking at the amount of current construction that began only days after the end of last semester!

This current period of time will probably go down in NEC history for several reasons – the construction project, the 40th anniversary of Jazz Studies and Improvisation at NEC, as well as a new system of orchestral placement. Also new this year, saxophonist Miguel Zenon, and pianist Fred Hersch join the faculty of our Jazz Studies and Improvisation department.

With all these things being augmented and re-structured under the same roof (which is also, by chance, being rebuilt), we still look around and see people practicing orchestral excerpts, composing alone at a piano, or in a 3rd floor studio playing jazz standards and originals with musicians who study that tradition.

This will never change, and of course we hear more than what was mentioned above, but seeing a jazz composer collaborate with a classical vocalist and a string trio or a symphony orchestra (for example) is a rare sight here, and is usually not an administrative priority. For the most part, this kind of work is something that is

left up to us to create for ourselves. Robert Creeley, a great postmodern poet who visited NEC often, can be heard on record greeting the audience before a 2004 performance of Steve Lacy's *Futurities* (a setting of Creeley's poetry). Among his words are "these are musicians of the NEC Jazz...ah, I don't want to call it a department..."

We're lucky to be in a place where all this music co-exists, and there *has* been some (*wonderful*) official inter-departmental collaboration over the years.

Hankus Netsky writes:

"In the late 1990s, NEC produced two very large-scale PBS Jewish music specials -each including over 200 students from every department in the school."

Other examples of inter-departmental collaboration at NEC are the following:

- Ran Blake's Annual Halloween concerts (C.I department), which have always included students from many different majors.
- Anthony Coleman's faculty Composition recital

(Spring 09), which brought together student performers from most departments.

- The Spring 09 performance of the Nils Lindberg *Requiem* featured the Chorus, Jazz Orchestra, and instrumentalists from the Jazz, CI, and Classical programs.

- Saxophonist Wayne Shorter is scheduled to perform with the NEC Philharmonic in late October to celebrate "40 years of Jazz" at NEC.

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THE PENGUIN STAFF WELCOME YOU TO NEC!!!



Jesse Weiner

Surviving Freshman Year as a Vegetarian

by Samuel Chabrow

Maintaining a vegetarian diet requires effort and diligence, even when fortunate enough to have a private kitchen at your disposal. Becoming a vegetarian means checking the ingredients of products at the supermarket that everyone else mindlessly throws into the basket, researching the origins of rennet, carmine red, gelatin and countless other ingredients most people don't realize are in their foods, and losing the simplicity of throwing a steak on the grill for dinner.

Not that I have any desire to return to eating meat. Nor does the extra work that it requires not yield great benefit. I think that my habit of checking ingredients and reading labels has made me better aware of what I am consuming. This conscious effort of monitoring what I am eating has helped me largely avoid the issues of weight gain that the rest of my family has dealt with. And with a home fully stocked with vegetarian options and parents willing to eat predominately vegetarian as well, I had significant control over what food I could eat.

Coming to New England Conservatory threatened that lifestyle. Gone was my kitchen, my large reserves of vegetarian meals, my parents cooking for me. Now all I had was \$975 of points per semester at Bistro 33 and a very small refrigerator I shared with my roommate. Yet although Bistro 33 is no vegetarian paradise and lacks the resources to cater to vegetarians in the same way that larger universities can, it is still possible to maintain your moral convictions as a vegetarian, eat a few meals a day, and stay on budget.

The first thing to realize, and this goes for vegetarians and carnivores, is that for the fall semester your meal plan provides you with less than \$9 a day to spend

on campus. With the average lunch and dinner served at Bistro 33 costing at least \$4 dollars, not including drinks. This means that you will almost definitely need to either add money to your meal plan or occasionally eat off campus. You will also need to find cheaper options that you can quickly turn to in the dining hall.

At any given meal at Bistro 33 there will be one

as well. You can also ask the servers for pieces of bread or bagels and use the salad bar to make your own sandwich much cheaper than any on the menu. This past semester I ate an everything bagel with cream cheese, onions, and tomato almost every day. It became a little monotonous, but it helped me get through the year without adding to my meal plan. To be really cheap, you can buy these ingredients at Whole Foods or Shaws and keep them in your room until you need them.



photo courtesy of Daniel Rios

“generally vegetarian” option. I say “generally vegetarian” because vegetarians hold different standards concerning dairy and eggs. I personally avoid most products containing cheese because some cheeses contain rennet, an enzyme taken from the cow's stomach used in the cheese's curdling process. With only one option, occasionally the meal being served either won't meet your standards or might not sound appealing to you. Fortunately, Bistro 33 maintains a well-stocked salad bar where you not only have control over the ingredients, but can save money

When there is still no appealing option or you've gotten tired of all those bagels, then you should take advantage of the restaurants nearby. Boston Shawarma, ERC, Moby Dick's, Pan Thai, Pho & I and Quiznos all have great vegetarian options, good prices and are within a block or two from school. Microwavable meals are available at Whole Foods and at the convenience stores. I think the best vegetarian secret is that 24 Hours College Convenience sells a variety of Deep brand vegetarian microwavable Indian dinners for \$4.

Although good deals are available off campus, it is still money out of your pocket instead of off your card. Instead of trying to go off campus for your favorite meals, try to bring them to Bistro 33. Sarah and Dan, the managers of Bistro 33 strive to be aware and meet the needs and answer the concerns of all students. Although occasionally a cook will make a mistake in preparing a vegetarian meal, Sarah and Dan do

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What to look forward to at *Bistro 33*

- New Iced Coffee and Brewed Iced Tea Station!
- We now have two soups daily! Try one of our fresh soups with a sandwich or salad option for a great lunch!
- New Deli & Grill items to compliment your favorites! New items include a Salad of the Day, Steak & Cheeses, Vegan Eggplant Burgers, and much more!
- We have expanded our convenient Grab N Go Sandwich, Salad and Snack choices for those in a rush!

Bistro Bucks Bonus Buy!

From August 31st thru September 11th, you can purchase 100 Bistro Bucks for only \$80! (Valid up to 6 increments) See Sara or Dan in the dining hall for details

One Day Only!

Thursday, September 10th
Buy Any Sized Hot Coffee, Iced Coffee, or
Brewed Iced Tea for only \$1.25
With This Coupon



*limit one per customer

Visit us at www.nec.campusdish.com or join us on Facebook for updates & events.

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a commendable job in informing NEC's vegetarian students of their options and working with them to provide a greater variety of meals that people will actually enjoy eating.

This year I am moving into an apartment and will be regaining my own kitchen. Although I will no longer have to choose between taking out my wallet at a restaurant or using money on a card I was required to purchase, I am looking forward to sitting down with all of you again this year, back at Bistro 33, with a nice vegetarian meal or bagel.



Samuel Chabrow is a sophomore composition major. Send comments and questions about this article to samuel.chabrow@necmusic.edu

Letter From the Editor

Welcome to NEC! The next few years promise to be filled with musical enterprises and remarkable performances. The people you will meet and the places you will go are what make the NEC experience an invaluable one. Students come here to study from all over the world, and it is a true accomplishment to now be a part of such an institution. As artists, music is our true passion but having a second outlet of expression is crucial to maintaining a healthy balance. We at *The Penguin* hope to provide you with said medium: concert reviews, opinion articles, photos, interviews, poetry, and more are all welcomed. For the past three years, we have successfully distributed issues consisting of works by students, faculty, and staff. *The Penguin* has become an integral part of the NEC community, and we hope to maintain its vitality for many years to come. Congratulations on your acceptance to NEC, and I hope to have the opportunity to meet and work with many of you.



Best,
Anne
Editor of *The Penguin*

Opinion: The Nature of a Right

by Ross Holcombe

To all of the new students joining our community, welcome to NEC! To returning students, welcome back! The next few years of your life are an important time to grow and develop as musicians and as people. Being in a place like Boston offers many opportunities to experience new ideas and points of view that you might not be familiar with. Whether it's your studio teacher offering a new idea about the interpretation of Beethoven or someone expressing their views on the relative merits of Cappy's versus BHOP, it is up to you to weigh the facts of the situation and use those facts to arrive at your own conclusion about what is right. With that in mind, it's time to start asking ourselves some important questions.

Is health care a right? Barack Obama thinks so, as do many other conservative and liberal leaders alike. There have been countless hours of debate over the new health care bill with members of both sides trying furiously to make the bill conform to their idea of what government provided health care should be about. Throughout the debate, Republicans and Democrats have argued over many specific points in the bill, but very few are actually stopping to ask if the government has any right to provide health coverage to its citizens at all.

So what is a right? Why are some things rights and not others? Many people claim that health care is a right, but would find it preposterous if someone else suggested that owning a computer is a right. Why should the government provide the citizens of the United States with health care, but not with computers? The correct answer is that neither of these things are rights, and the government has no reason to provide either one.

The explanation of this answer lies in the difference between things that are truly rights (such as life, liberty, and owning private property), and things that are falsely assumed to be rights (such as health care or computers).

Things in the former category – true rights – are guarantees of your ability to action on your own behalf. Things in the latter category are material items that must be gotten from somebody else.

A right to private property doesn't mean that someone must provide you with private property to own. It merely acknowledges your right to act to acquire and keep private property in a way that does not violate another person's rights in the process. Similarly, a right to life does not imply that people must provide you with things that can keep you alive, such as food, shelter, or health care. It means that each person is free to live without the threat of their life being taken by someone else, and that they may act to improve their own life as long as doing so does not infringe on someone else's rights.

This right to action, therefore, does not mean that people are entitled to the products of someone else's labor on any terms they wish to dictate. True freedom is not a claim on someone else's life or work. If a right to health care is assumed, then it implies that one person's need of health care dictates that a doctor must provide it to them. Or if a doctor is to be compensated for his services, then the right to health care implies that someone else must be forced to pay for it.

In such a scenario, the rights of the doctors are violated. A doctor has a right to his own life, such that one person's claim of need does not trump his right to choose when, for whom, and for how much compensation he works. Subverting a doctor's right to choose these things violates his true rights while trying to provide for the false rights of others. Similarly, forcing taxpayers to bankroll a socialized health care system violates their right to private property. When people work, they have a right to keep the fruits of their labor. Taking their money by force in order to provide the false right of health care undermines

the individual's true right to private property. No matter how the situation is analyzed, it is impossible to provide for an incorrectly assumed right such as health care while still respecting Americans' true rights in the process.

The fundamental difference between a right, and something that is falsely assumed to be a right, is freedom versus force. A true right implies the freedom to pursue a value, but a false 'right' to health care (or any other material item or service) takes away someone else's freedom by forcing them to provide it to others.

When the true nature of a right is examined, it becomes apparent that health care is not a right at all. Health care is no different than a computer – it is merely a product that people should be free to purchase in the marketplace like any other. Using governmental force to make some people provide health care to others is not going to improve our current situation, but more importantly will violate our true rights to life, liberty, and private property.

Only by offering people the freedom to pursue health care on their own terms, maintaining complete respect for everyone's rights in the process, will our ailing system become healthy once more.



Ross Holcombe is a senior trombone major. Send comments and questions about this article to ross.holcombe@necmusic.edu

NEC for Dummies

by Kyle Spraker

Welcome to NEC! Your new home for the next two, four, or possibly *six* years. It may seem like forever, but your time here is relatively short. It's my hope that when you're finished you'll have more than a vivid image of a practice room and a creamy white complexion to show for it. Without sounding too cliché, you're very fortunate to be at an incredible school in one of America's more stimulating cities. Unfortunately, your first two weeks were most likely spent filling out enough paperwork to knock down a small forest and you may have missed some things along the way. Lucky for you, NEC is a very social atmosphere and we're all more than willing to help you with any questions you may have. In the meantime here are a few helpful bits of knowledge I've acquired since entering the little-big world of NEC:

Remember all that money you borrowed to come here? Well, after considering the top notch instruction, gigantic facility, and all-star faculty these other services might seem like just the cherry on top, but after one year you'll wonder how you lived without them:

1. Firestone- In the lower depths of NEC (below Brown Hall) you'll find the audio library where thousands of high quality CDs, LPs, videos, DVDs, and yes, quite a few historic NEC cassette tapes are all at your disposal. You won't be able to take anything with you, but there are plenty of listening stations including two large rooms with some sweet retro purple couches. Oh, and be nice to the staff... or else!

2. Spaulding- If you're a grad student don't be afraid to cross the street. I know those dorm kids smell funny, but you don't want to miss out on the music library! Scores galore, chamber music, solos, and even some books with *words*... You might even catch a glimpse of The Penguin's gorgeous editor ;-)

3. Gig Office- right next to the advising offices in the St. Botolph building is a board that looks like a wanted ad section in the newspaper, except just for musicians. Sign up and check it regularly so you can have some opportunities to make some well-needed cash!

4. Health Clinic- we all know that getting sick is *completely unacceptable* as a musician, but before you go around spreading the next black plague throughout the halls of Jordan consider visiting the school's health center. They also offer counseling for those psychologically tougher months of the year... you laugh *now*...

5. Computer Lab- never been there myself (I have a computer in "my" office), but I bet it's loaded with fully music-ified Macs. Take the lower path (through the parking lot) to St. Botolph and walk down the hall, you'll see it.

6. Practice Rooms- good luck...

7. Student Activities Center- located next to Brown Hall; these guys are responsible for some of the cool (and super cheap) events that you can take part of *outside* of NEC *gasp*. Last year I went on the ski trip where \$30 covered transportation, lift ticket, lessons, AND rentals for your choice of

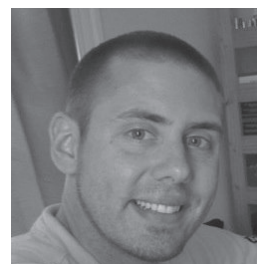
snowboard or skis. Keep your eyes open for emails and posters of their events, you'll thank yourself... Oh and if you're smart you'll go there to get your BSO college card right away!

8. Free Workshops/Classes- At orientation you probably got a schedule of some interesting extra-musical classes taking place at our school. They almost always provide free BHOP pizza and sodas so it's a win-win situation. Past topics, I remember, covered performance anxiety, budgeting, audition prep, website design, health issues, and much more all related to the life of a musician.

9. Bistro 33- I'll be honest, most of the food joints directly around school are pretty lame (except Boston Shawarma), but our school's "cafeteria" is a diamond in the rough. They have it all and even take requests for future dinner options! I might be biased after winning an Ipod touch for taking a Bistro survey, but I'd recommend saving your money and going to NEC's "café".

10. Music Espresso- on the other side of Huntington is yet another strangely placed building belonging to NEC. Go up the stairs and you'll find the school's music store, stocked with textbooks, scores, method books, solo rep, chamber music, and NEC paraphernalia all for purchase. While you're at it, go buy your mom an NEC sweater for Christmas; they love that stuff.

Again, welcome to NEC! I look forward to meeting and playing with you all. (P.S.- Many of the places mentioned provide job opportunities for students, but you'll have to move quick!)



Kyle Spraker is a second year Grad trumpet major. Send comments and questions about this article to kyle.spraker@necmusic.edu

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If you are a new or returning student who wants to get involved with a new student organization for inter-departmental collaboration, please contact me, or any of the following students using their NEC email: (firstname.lastname@necmusic.edu): Nell Cohen (BM '12), Alex Chaloff (BM '10), or Dave Tarantino (BM '12) Enjoy the beginning of the year in this new environment of tradition, innovation, and renovation!

p.s. – there are two really great books that I read this summer which pertain to this issue: *Measure by Measure: a History of the New England Conservatory* (by former NEC liberal arts chair Bruce McPherson, & James Klein), and *Music as a Cultural System* by Henry Kingsbury. They are both in the Spaulding Library. Have Fun!



Jason Belcher is a senior CI major. Send comments and questions about this article to jason.belcher@necmusic.edu

Want to see your name here?



Write for The Penguin!

Send us a line at thepenguin@newenglandconservatory.edu.

Meetings TBD

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