

Preview**NEOSonicFest: final concert on April 6 at BW
to feature "Young and Emerging Composers"**

by Mike Telin



The debut edition of NEOSonicFest will conclude much the way it began, with a concert that pays homage to Cleveland Chamber Symphony (CCS) founder Ed London. On Sunday, April 6 beginning at 7:30 pm in Baldwin Wallace University's Gamble Auditorium, Steve Smith will lead CCS in a concert featuring Howie Smith's *Epilogue* and Charles Ives *Tone Roads No. 1*.

The evening will also feature a program near and dear to London, the annual Young and Emerging Composers concert. In a recent conversation Smith said the program is very important because it encourages and gives young composers the opportunity to learn by hearing performances of the music they're writing.

Clint Needham (left), composer in residence and assistant professor of music at Baldwin Wallace, and the person responsible for coordinating the concert, agrees with Smith. "As a student at BW I was also part of the Young and Emerging Composers program", Needham told us by telephone. "It was my first professional performance and my first orchestral performance so it was a big deal to me," adding that coordinating the concert is special to him. "It's a weird sort of roundabout way to give back, but it's really nice."

How did hearing an orchestra playing Needham's music for the first time change him as a composer? "To be honest, what it really did was to make me want to figure out how to get the experience again. I thought, my gosh, if this is what being a professional composer is, let me keep doing it. I still remember it quite vividly. It was the first rehearsal, the down beat was given and music happened, which for a student composer is rare. In conservatory what usually happens is that you write a piece and then you beg some of your friends to play it. The first rehearsal is a dreadful mess, and even at the performance it's not really your vision."

Another part of the learning process for Needham was gaining an understanding of how a professional orchestra operates. "When you get the opportunity to work with professionals it's just a different mindset. I remember all of us composers that year felt the same. This is the magic of this type of reading sessions – many times it is the composers' first experience of working with professionals and many times their first orchestral piece. So it is an important mission of the Chamber Symphony."

In addition to hearing his own composition performed, Needham also remembers how wonderful it was to meet and learn from his fellow student colleagues. “What I love about the program is that it’s all student composers from what I’d call the Northern corridor of Ohio, so it’s great to hear what is going on at the other schools. And, many times it’s their first experience of hearing music by composers of their own age.”

And whose music will we be hearing on Sunday evening? “That’s a good question,” Needham said with a laugh, although he goes on to explain that on Thursday, April 3 the six finalists will come to BW for a rehearsal and reading session, after which Steven Smith will choose two or three of the compositions to be performed during Sunday’s concert. In addition to the rehearsal, all six finalists will also receive a recording of their piece. “So no one walks away empty handed.”

Prior to the rehearsal Smith will meet with each finalist to go over their scores. And following the rehearsal Smith will convene a discussion. “It really is an educational experience,” Needham said, “it’s like a local version of what the American Composers Orchestra does with their reading sessions. But just as important, with this program Cleveland Chamber Symphony is playing a big role in helping to shape new American music.”

As an aside, the students were asked to submit a composition that used a maximum orchestration of double string quart plus bass, one on a part winds, horn, percussion, piano, and harp. They were not required to use the full compliment of instruments.

Congratulations and good luck to the six finalists, who include Sean Hussey and Steven Hixson, Baldwin Wallace University; Hong-da Chin, Bowling Green State University; Yigian Chen and Collin Kenney, Case Western Reserve University; and Andrew Stock, Cleveland Institute of Music.

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