

Final Reflection on My 2016 Summer Enrichment Experience at Interlochen Center for the Arts

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This summer, I attended the Interlochen Percussion Institute in Interlochen, Michigan. It was a six-day-long foray into percussion, including clinics and masterclasses by various guest artists, and one student concert, featuring six different ensemble pieces.

The Guest Artists

In my opinion, the single best part of the program was learning from all of the guest artists who Interlochen invited to give clinics and masterclasses. The first one was Nancy Zeltsman, a famous marimbist who teaches at Berklee. Several people, including myself, played solos during her masterclass, and she gave advice to each person; I readily noted down her advice to apply to my own playing. The second artist we met was Anders Åstrand, a Swedish mallet player who specializes in improvisation. He did some extremely interesting demonstrations with student volunteers, such as improvising with their eyes closed. He also exhibited unusual styles, such as playing the vibraphone with wiffle balls and whisks. Next, we met the principal percussionist of the Paris Opera, Jean-Baptiste Leclère, who talked about orchestral percussion. To me, this was the most interesting day of the program, because he not only went over the basic things to think about when playing the instruments, but he also covered several common orchestral excerpts one might be asked to play. I wrote down what he said for future reference, including for use this fall when I audition for the all-district band/orchestra again. The fourth artist we got to meet was Mike Truesdell, a freelance percussionist operating in New York City. He taught us about what the freelance business was like, and what skills are needed. He also regaled us with the story of his first freelance gig, involving an “art statue bobbing in the East River.” The final visitor to the camp was Keith Brown, a professor at the University of Tennessee. He worked with us on drumset, as well as playing with us in the final student concert.

The Ensembles

While the clinics were great, we spent the majority of our time at the camp in ensemble rehearsal. Our group of 30 students was split up into six ensembles, each person in two of them; plus, one final piece in which everyone performed. Most of the pieces were relatively challenging, but the real challenge was given to us by Keith Aleo, the Director of Percussion at Interlochen. He only directed three of the seven pieces, but those happened to be the three in which I was playing. Every day, he challenged us to play better and better, attempting to perfect our pieces in time for the concert, in under a week. It was a great experience to play with all of the other students, many of whom were more skilled and experienced than I. It is not an experience that I have ever had before, nor it is one that I am likely to have again before college.

The Lessons

I learned a great deal from my time at Interlochen. Naturally, I picked up a few technical skills. For example, Josh Jones helped me with my snare drum roll, and Keith Brown taught me to improve my brush technique. But the single most consequential ideal I took away from the week was inspiration. By seeing what all of my peers, many the same age as I (though in lower grades of high school), had accomplished simply by practicing more than I ever had was enough to make me want to get home and just start practicing. I had taken so many notes, seen so many cool solos and been exposed to so many interesting ideas that it all inspired me to keep working to improve myself.

Moving forward, I'm planning to use what I learned from this camp, first by making it into the All-State Orchestra, and after that by getting admitted to a good school of music. So, thank you, Garwin Family Foundation.