



*... dedicated to the
promotion, composition,
performance, understanding
and dissemination of
new and contemporary
music ...*

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Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Contemporary Music Culture

Composers Circle: An Interview with Eric Guinivan

by Michael Torres



In May 2012 composer, Eric Guinivan (pictured left), started a project simply to hear more new music and to discover what was happening across the country. This project, www.composerscircle.com, has since launched him to the forefront of new music culture as a leader and innovator. *Composers Circle* is an online community and resource that profiles one composer and one piece every day. I first met Eric (www.ericguinivan.com) at the 2013 SCI National Conference in Columbus, Ohio where his piece *Fractured Light* for Wind Ensemble was premiered as the winner of the SCI/ASCAP Student Commission Competition. *Composers Circle* had been around for less than a year then. Currently an Assistant Professor of Composition at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, Eric is still passionately devoted to his project which has featured more than 1000 composers in almost three years!

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About the Newsletter

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Newsletter Contact Information:

Benjamin Williams
1221 Cliffdale Dr.
Clinton, MS 39056
(330) 268-2590

newsletter@societyofcomposers.org

For other SCI business:

Society of Composers, Inc.
P.O. Box 687
Mineral Wells, TX 76067-0687
secretary@societyofcomposers.org

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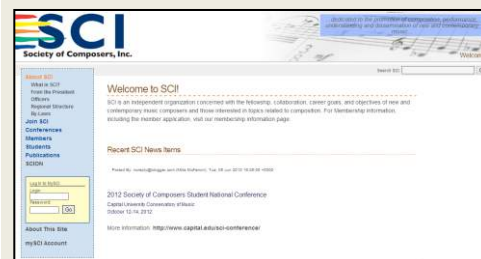
Upcoming SCI Events

2015 Region VI Conference March 6-8, 2015

Henderson State University
Phillip Schroeder, Host

2015 SCI National Conference Fall 2015

In collaboration with the
Florida Contemporary Music Festival
James Paul Sain, Co-host
Paul Richards, Co-host



Internet & Email

www.societyofcomposers.org

- Conference dates and submission guidelines
- Contact information and links to member web-pages
- Student chapters and opportunities
- CDs and journals produced by SCI
- Details on SCI such as membership, contacts for officers, regional structure, by-laws, newsletter archives and more...

SCION

SCION is a listing of opportunities on our website exclusively for members. It is updated on a continual basis so that it may be checked at any time for the most current notices. In addition, members are emailed on the first Monday of each month to remind them to visit the site for new or recent postings. The large number of listings is easily managed by a table of contents with links to the individual notices. In-depth coverage; contest listings in full; all items listed until expiration; this is a valuable resource that you may print in its entirety or in part at any time.

John Bilotta, SCION Editor
scion@societyofcomposers.org

scimembers

scimembers is a member-driven e-mail mailing list that is intended to facilitate communication between members of the Society on topics of concern to composers of contemporary concert music. It conveys whatever notices or messages are sent by its members, including announcements of performances and professional opportunities, as well as discussions on a wide variety of topics. For more information, including how to join and participate in the listserv:

<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/listserv.html>

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Membership Information

For complete details, please visit
<http://www.societyofcomposers.org/join/membership.html>.

Full Membership (\$75/year): Eligible to submit scores to the National Conferences, regional conferences, SCI Recording Series, SCI Journal of Music Scores. Access to the SCI Newsletter in electronic form. Optional subscription to [scimembers], the SCI listserv and all other SCI publications. Eligible to vote on Society Matters and in elections for the National Council.

Joint Membership (\$100/year): Same benefits as full members

Senior Membership (\$35/year): Open to those 65 years of age or older, or retired. Same benefits as full members.

Associate Membership (\$40/year): Open to performers and other interested professionals. Receives the SCI Newsletter in electronic form and can participate in national and regional conferences.

Student Membership (\$35/year): Eligible to submit to national and regional conferences and to vote in society matters. Access to all SCI publications.

Student Chapter Membership (\$25/year): Same benefits as student members, but only available on campuses having Student Chapters.

Institutional Membership (\$40/year): Organizations receive hard copy of the SCI Newsletter and other mailings.

Lifetime Membership (\$1400 or \$150/year for 10 years): Benefits the same as full members, for life.

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Composers Circle: An Interview with Eric Guinivan

(Continued from Page 1)

T *Composers Circle* has become an important online community of new music and, I think, a champion of sharing creative musical works of our time. How did it all start? Where did the idea and goals for *Composers Circle* come from?

G As I approached the end of my doctorate in 2011, I realized that I wasn't listening to much music outside of my own small circle of friends and colleagues, and I felt a need to branch out in my listening. I was living in Los Angeles, and I wasn't very familiar with what composers were doing in other parts of the country aside from LA and New York. I wanted to expand my horizons by listening to more music from a wider geographic area. That was coupled with another desire: I wished that there were more platforms and opportunities for composers to share their work aside from competitions. We're very lucky as composers to have a relatively large number of annual competitions to enter to get performances or to win awards; these opportunities help us get our work out there and have it recognized by a larger body of listeners, but most competitions have a limited number of winners or participants out of necessity. The idea for *Composers Circle* grew out of wanting to do something that was both going to expand the breadth of music that I was listening to while also providing composers an opportunity to share their work in a specifically non-competitive, community-focused environment. I look at *Composers Circle* like an online composition forum and so far the site has realized that vision effectively. I've become familiar with many, many more composers since launching the site, and it's been a great opportunity for me to help them share their work with more people from around the country. I also know of at least two commissions that have resulted from composers that were featured on *Composers Circle*.

T It sounds like *Composers Circle* developed from your musical curiosity and it also sounds like it's a lot of

work. Do you have help with this and how much effort does it take on your part to do this project?

G I mostly run the site by myself, although recently Brandon Scott Rumsey has been helping to curate the site's competition and opportunities listings. On average it takes me about four or five hours a week of going through the submissions, scheduling features, and programming the features and social media for the site. I've been thinking about trying to get some extra help to increase the breadth of the site, but it's always a question of time and logistics.

T You mentioned expanding and you've started doing that by adding a database for competitions.

G Yes, I was hoping to create one more outlet where composers can see what opportunities are available to them in a clean format that's free and easy to navigate. Currently the competitions listing can be edited by anyone that wishes to add an opportunity to the listings.

T How many composers have been featured since *Composers Circle* began and how many visits has it received?

G *Composers Circle* has run over 1,000 features of music by about 750 composers since it launched in May 2012. It has been visited over 100,000 times by about 65,000 unique visitors from 143 countries. It's had a really nice reach. The site has had visitors from almost every country in Europe, Asia, and South America too.

T Let's talk about the composers that have been featured. What's the average age of submitting composers?

G For the first month of features, I reached out to composers I knew and asked them to send a piece to feature for this new project. I remember several people telling me "You're going to feature someone new eve-

ry day? You're going to run out of submissions really quick." I was worried that that would be the case, and I figured I would make the switch to one composer a week if needed, but since the site's launch there has always been a steady stream of people interested in being featured on the site. Because the initial group of composers were selected mainly from my college colleagues, the age of featured composers averaged between 20 and 30. I'd say it still skews younger towards current college students or recent graduates, but the site has profiled a decent number of people over 35. Looking at composition competitions and festivals, the number of submission opportunities seems to drop dramatically once you pass 35 or 40, and I wanted this site to create one more ongoing opportunity that doesn't have that limitation.

T What's the selection process like?

G Composers fill out a form with all the information needed for a feature including a head shot, short biography, link to their website, and a recording they'd like to be featured. I review the materials and usually get back to them within a few weeks. I've had to turn down very few submissions, most often because the composer has sent in a midi realization rather than a live recording. While I understand that realizations serve an effective purpose for competitions and other opportunities, I feel like there would be less interest in the site overall if it featured synthesized recordings of pieces intended for concert performance. With no other restrictions of style, instrumentation, or duration, I've been overwhelmed and extremely humbled by the quantity of very high-quality works that have come in.

T Along those lines, are you surprised by the vast amounts of differing musical styles and aesthetic approaches of compositions that are submitted? As a follower of the site, I'm surprised by all the variety of styles that people are composing in, and composing well in, right now.

G Yes, I've definitely had the same reaction, and I've been impressed to the point of feeling daunted when I go to compose myself. I remember hearing Steve Reich talk in 2008 when he was visiting the University of Southern California, and one of the things he said really stuck with me. He explained that when he was in school, serial music was the clearly dominant compositional style and, as such, he had something to rebel against with his music as he discovered his own voice. He went on to say that he did not envy young composers today in that we lack a clearly dominant style to go with or against. Today, anything goes. That resonates with me when I discover really great music through *Composers Circle* written in so many different stylistic frameworks. Since starting the site, several times I've gone to start a new piece and thought 'Well, now what do I do? Should I try something new? Should I get out of my comfort zone stylistically?' I've discovered some really compelling pieces in styles that I didn't initially expect would speak to me on a personal musical level. It's made me reflect a lot about what I want to do with my own compositional voice.

T I assume that the majority of traffic to your site is from composers and musicians. Does *Composers Circle* ever reach non-musicians and do you have any ideas for advocacy and outreach to non-musicians?

G That's a really good question, and I'm afraid I don't have a very specific answer for you. I think you're right that most of the current audience is in the classical music world already. The word has spread mainly through social media, and I've been hoping that it will eventually branch out from the new music/classical community and reach some new ears. I've seen some evidence of this happening from the people that have liked the site on social media, but I'm not really sure what that next step is in terms of reaching a broader audience. Looking back on it now, I think when I started I would have been surprised to see the visitor numbers that the site has right now, but I'm also happy to see that they're steadily rising. Slowly, but

steadily.

T You spoke briefly about social media and I was wondering if you think that the age of the internet and instantaneous access to information has helped or hurt art music composers?

G It's been interesting to watch the flare up over the past few years of the seemingly endless debate over whether classical music and art music in general is "dead." I've struggled to find my own place in that debate, but I look at the internet resources available today and think there's a strong case to be made that there's never been a better time to be a composer. You can effectively get your music to people without having to get them into the concert hall. The internet is an essential tool for composers today and we should continue to push ourselves to find new ways to use it as a vehicle for our art. I think the progress on that front has been fairly steady. I really admire projects like the Metropolitan Opera or Berlin Philharmonic's digital libraries of performances. What amazing resources! I can't help but feel that these are very natural extensions of what we're doing in concert halls today.

T Like the Naxos Music Library, also.

G Absolutely. A terrific resource.

T Finally, do you have any advice for young composers trying to bring awareness and attention to their music?

G I think, most simply, to be passionate and proactive. Infuse everything you do with passionate integrity, believe in it, and be proactive and creative in finding ways to share your work with others. Look at what's happening in the world around us and try to find new or unexpected ways of sharing our work whether it's

through finding new ways to engage the audience or finding a new audience to engage. This goes along with your previous question. The path to building a career as a composer is probably more diverse, varied, and multi-faceted now than ever before, and there's a necessity for us to be creative with how we approach it. Considering *Composers Circle*, I realized soon after it started that in addition to providing a new platform for sharing new music, running the site also provided me an invaluable opportunity to network professionally. I'm personally familiar with each composer profiled on the site and many of them have gotten to know my work as well, so the site has become a significant part of my own career building. It's been great to not only get to know the work of other composers from around the country but also to share some of my music with them. *Composers Circle* is one of the projects I've pursued to be more proactive getting my own music, and new music in general, out to a larger audience.

T Speaking of your music, what are you composing right now and will we hear any of your music on the site in the near future?

G I recently completed my first string quartet, which was commissioned by Chamber Music America for the Argus Quartet in Los Angeles and premiered in Amsterdam this past October. I just finished *Shadow Dances*, an orchestral work commissioned by Lake Union Civic Orchestra in Seattle for their 10th anniversary season. I featured myself on *Composers Circle* for the first time on the site's one-year anniversary with a thank you message to its visitors, and I recently featured a new piano solo of mine, *Prelude: Hymn and Snowfall*, on *Composers Circle* for the site's 1,000th feature.

COMPOSERS CIRCLE

one day. one composer. one discovery.

Message from the President

by James Paul Sain

Colleagues,

I hope this finds you happy and well in the New Year. I was recently reflecting on the purpose of the Society of Composers, Inc. It is not uncommon that I hear the question, "Why should I join SCI?" On the surface it might seem like a rather simple question that can be answered by a number of platitudes such as, "to support contemporary music." Prospective members rightfully look to our website seeking a list of services that our organization provides, and find the list significant. Yet, I feel less than satisfied by those answers.

Bear with me for a moment while I share a personal story. The reason for the story will become clear. I've been involved in scouting for a number of years as a parent and adult leader. I hear similar questions about scouts. "What will scouting do for my child and I?" I've come to understand that receiving isn't the answer. If we only do things for what is in it for us, we miss the point of community. As a member of Boy Scouts of America's Order of the Arrow, I've come to learn that the purpose of scouting is what we do for others in "cheerful service."

I never took upon the mantle of your president for what it could do for me. Frankly, that would have been very wrongheaded. I am here in service to each of you...but I need some assistance.

There is no way that any one of us can put on nine regionals, a national and a student national conference each year. This requires your buy-in to the fact that the purpose of your membership in SCI is to help one another. If each of us would do that just once in our careers, we would have over 140 years of events covered! The generosity would outlive each of us.

We are about to have our Region 6 event at Henderson

State University in Arkadelphia, AR. Our next national conference will be at the University of Florida this coming fall (call to be announced very soon) and I just heard that Region 1 is going to be returning to the University of Maine next fall. I would love to get six more events scheduled for Regions 2-5, 7 & 8 in the next year. If you're in one of these regions (please see our website for a map of our regional structure) I hope you'll consider what you can do to either put on an event yourself or in collaboration with institutions and organizations in your area.

I would like to also give kudos to Region 6. They have a regional meeting scheduled for their coming conference



where they'll discuss their representatives and plan for future conferences. I believe they have plans for not only this year but 2016-2018. Planning ahead like this makes the process so much easier on everyone. Each region should have their conferences scheduled 2-3 years in advance.

Please don't hesitate to contact me or your regional representatives with your questions or solutions. If you're in Region 2, you need regional representatives. Again, contact me if you have an interest in serving and you're in the NY, NJ or Puerto Rico Region 2 area.

I like to thank those that help our organization, and many of you do it regularly. If you have yet to help the SCI community, perhaps now is a time you can consider what you can do to provide performance opportunities. Even students within their student chapters continue to promote their colleagues' music at home and through nano-conferences. Collaborate. As is said in the old proverb, many hands make light work!

With much appreciation,

Jim

New Horizons for Student Members

by Carter John Rice

An exciting addition has found its way into the *SCI Newsletter*: a student-member section. Michael Rene Torres and Benjamin Williams, the joint editors of the *Newsletter*, have come up with this intriguing idea and I will be helping them by serving as the editor for student submissions. This means we will now be looking for original writings from current student members for each bi-monthly publication. For our non-student readers, please pass this information along! It will be a great opportunity for student composers to gain exposure as well as to share their ideas with the rest of the membership.

Having served as the national student representative for the past year, I wanted to use this first entry to share some of the new and exciting activities that are occurring for students of SCI. Firstly, each of our eight regions now have a student-representative. These representatives are reaching out to the student-chapters within their regions to establish better lines of communication, as well as to curate our regional “mix tapes” (of which many of you have no doubt heard). Most importantly, however, the student-representatives are helping to plan various “snapshot” conferences within each region. These conferences are a chance to share your music and establish connections with fellow student-composers in your region. Our goal is to have at least one snapshot conference in every region each year. These events can vary in size, from a score exchange between two schools to a gathering of multiple universities for several days of concerts and events. If you have any interest in helping to plan or host a snapshot conference, please contact your regional student representative or myself at your earliest

convenience.

In addition, this first entry gives me an opportunity to reach out to all student members of SCI. If you have thoughts, concerns, issues, questions, or most importantly ideas on how to improve the student experience within SCI, please contact me! I’m here to represent the interests of all student members, and I certainly can’t do that without hearing from you. Nearly half the membership of SCI is com-

prised of students, and we’re the future of the organization. SCI allows us opportunities for camaraderie, networking, career building, and musical exploration. I’ve only recently discovered just how much this organization can give to students, and the more you put in the more you get out.

There has been a recent surge of activity and energy amongst the student members of SCI and this *Newsletter* addition will only continue the trend. If you are a student and are interested in contributing, please contact Michael Rene Torres, Benjamin Williams, or myself. Articles can be interviews, concert reviews, member news, recent project descriptions, blog style entries, etc.

We’re particularly interested in learning about what each chapter is doing in their community, how they are presenting new music in their concerts, and anything innovative or entrepreneurial. These submissions should be between 500-1500 words. More specific information on article requirements and formatting is available upon request.

We look forward to hearing from the students of SCI on what exciting events may be happening at their schools or within their regions!

