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performance, understanding
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An Interview with Don Freund, Composer in Residence, 2015 National Conference of the Society of Composers, Inc.

by **Navid Bargizan**

Internationally acclaimed composer, pianist, and conductor Don Freund is the featured composer for the 2015 SCI National Conference at the University of Florida. Since 1992, Don has been a professor of composition at Indiana University, and from 1972 to 1992 he was the chair of the composition department at the Memphis State University. While Freund's numerous compositions cover a wide range of styles and genres, his scores are published by Lauren Keiser Music, Boosey and Hawkes, E.C. Schirmer, Seesaw and Vivace Press. As a composer-in-residence and guest-lecturer Freund has appeared around the world at national and international festivals in the USA, Australia, Belgium, Austria, U.K. Czech Republic, Netherlands, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Thailand. As the coordinator of several festivals, Freund has programmed over 1,000 new American works throughout his career. He has received numerous awards, grants and commissions, e.g., twice from the National endowment for the

Arts, a Guggenheim, as well as a MacGeorge Fellowship, Hanson Prize, the McCurdy Prize, The Aspen Prize and 25 ASCAP Awards.

The following is a truncated version of a longer phone-interview conducted on September 19, 2015 where Don Freund and I discussed his career, compositions and his advice to young composers.

NB: *Dr. Freund, would you please tell me how long have you been an SCI member?*

DF: I started teaching in 1972 at University of Memphis. The first thing I wanted to do there was to set up a big festival for composers, which started around 1974. We had a lot of new music in the festivals in Memphis, and I think the word got to the big boys. I think at that time it was still ASUC (American Society of University Composers). They were

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THE SCI NEWSLETTER



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

Society of Composers, Inc.

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2012 SCI Region VI Conference
October 5-6, 2012, West Texas A & M University, Canyon, Texas

By Matthew Saunders

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Upcoming SCI Events

2015 SCI National Conference November 12-14

The University of Florida School of Music
Gainesville, Florida
James Paul Sain, Co-host
Paul Richards, Co-host

2016 SCI Region VI Conference February 11-13

Friends University and Wichita State
University, Wichita, Kansas
Dan Racer, Co-host
Aleks Sternfeld-Dunn, Co-host

2016 SCI Region III Conference February 25-27

Marshall University
Huntington, West Virginia
Mark Zanter, Host

2017 SCI Region VIII Conference Spring 2017

Washington State University
Pullman, Washington
Ryan M. Hare, Host



Internet & Email

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- 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

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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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An Interview with Don Freund

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looking for a place to have a national conference and they had seen that Memphis was capable of organizing it. I guess word had gotten around that I was really interested in doing that kind of thing. So, I believe that my first actual contact with ASUC—later to become SCI—was as the director/coordinator of the national conference in 1980.

NB: As the featured composer of this year's conference, which is SCI's 50th anniversary, would you please tell me which of your pieces will be performed this year?

DF: Yes. First, I would like to say it's wonderful that the University of Florida is organizing the conference, which looks to be one of the biggest conferences that has been done, maybe since we did it at IU. It's an honor to be the composer-in-residence of the SCI's 50th anniversary. I'm looking forward to seeing all of the composers, and hearing all of the pieces, and of course it is great to have my own works programmed there.

I know of four of my works being performed and I've been told that there may be a couple of others. But of the ones I know for sure, there is a *Fanfare for 6 Trumpets*. That piece was actually written to celebrate the inauguration of a new chancellor here at Indiana University. The sad thing about this piece is that I was in the middle of writing it when 9/11 occurred. So, here I am writing this very celebratory sort of happy, up-beat, optimistic piece and this terrible world-changing event struck in the middle of it. First, I tried to put that out of my mind. I also didn't want to look like a sort of ambulance chaser, as some composers who try to find some big tragic event to write music about. But this event had such a tremendous impact on me that I felt that the fanfare couldn't go on without having some touch of it. It starts out with a very joyous kind of celebratory fanfare and then suddenly gets completely interrupted in the middle with some very disturbed kind of music. And then finally rebuilds itself into something that actually ends optimistically and hopefully. It's the return of the human spirit to conquer the terrible tragedies that happened. So that's what that piece was about.

They are also doing a piece of mine called *Jug Blues & Fat Pickin'* and that was written while I was still at Memphis. I

think all of these pieces were written while I was still in Memphis. They go back to a period of my life when I was still trying out different things. It's interesting because this is my first wind ensemble piece, and it was commissioned by the State of Tennessee for their Governor's School. I wanted to include things about Tennessee in it. The two things that I wanted to reflect in this piece were the Memphis Jug Bands of the twenties, which I found musically really fascinating, and then the banjo picking, which represents east Tennessee. It's funny that although this piece is one of the earliest pieces I wrote, it is by far the most performed; this is my warhorse. It's performed a lot and I'm always excited to hear it because I'm still very happy with the piece. There are two versions of this piece: an original version which was performed several times at Tennessee Conferences and in North Carolina and a second version where I made changes after the suggestions of a publisher. Ironically, he did not publish the piece, but I applied his suggestions anyway and it was finally published by MMB. With those changes I think the piece became a lot more marketable. So, in terms of success, I think it is good to listen to advice or criticism from outside because composers don't get that very often once they finish what they've written. You're out on your own and everyone tells you they love your piece but you don't get a lot of performances. So if I've learned a lesson from that piece, it is to try to get people to give you honest and maybe even negative criticisms that might help change some things. Especially if it's a piece like a band piece where you are trying to work with a certain kind of aesthetic and a certain kind of approach to music that, in my case, wasn't necessarily my own thing. I was never a band guy growing up. So, it's not something I'm much familiar with. For the upcoming conference I actually got an email from the band director asking which version I wanted to have performed and I thought for this big conference it's better to have the crisper, stronger, more pack-to-the-punch second version.

Another piece that has been performed a lot and will be performed in the conference is *Hard Cells*. It is also my 'maiden voyage' in the medium of *sinfonietta* ensemble, or one-on-a-part orchestra, which I feel very close to; that's the: a gathering

of 14, 15, 16... up to 20 players, which I think is the perfect ensemble for our time. Rather than focusing on orchestral music I'm really interested in focusing on writing music that has this kind of individuality, which links to the personality and clarity of individuals making music rather than a large orchestra performing. I also like to write orchestral music, so that's certainly still in my vocabulary. But I've written a lot of pieces for this smaller ensemble since *Hard Cells*, maybe ten, fortunately because we have this new music ensemble in IU that plays all these pieces for me. It's great to have that ensemble to work with. *Hard Cells* is written for that ensemble. Basically, my attitude about music is that there are two kinds of music: "hard cells" and "soft cells". Or, there is music that is organic and allows itself to modulate and change over time and then there is music that is more about picking a certain thing and keeping it insistent all the way through. I think the latter is a kind of a rock and roll attitude about music. I also like to divide the composers in to classes of hard cells and soft cells. For example, I think Bartok is a more organic composer, but Stravinsky works with these little cells consistently and all the way through. Also, Bach and Scarlatti are two different sides of the same style period. Bach's music is very organic and Scarlatti's music seems to be built around these little cells. They maybe get repeated or transposed an octave higher or something, but very little is done with them. I think jazz is organic and rock and roll is more hard cell oriented. So this is my sort of rock and roll, hard cell, Stravinsky-ish piece. The ending is very interesting because it's not like the rest of the piece at all. Something that I like to do a lot in my compositions is to have a non sequitur ending. At the end the pulse gets totally broken off into little repeating units that are of different lengths in different parts of the orchestra.

The really funny piece is *Passages*. This piece is written for Casio synthesizer, horn, and alto saxophone. My time in Memphis was divided between writing a lot of electronic keyboard music, as well as just pure acoustic music. I found in the writing for synthesizer a chance to do a lot of things that weren't available to me. Since I've left Memphis I haven't written anything of that sort because there have been so many great, interesting players around here in Indiana that my time and attention is totally taken up by just writing for real

instruments. But I've actually really loved playing around with these Casio keyboards and I like the idea that they were very cheap and available to everybody. This was written as a dance piece; it was commissioned by the Island Moving Company in Rhode Island. The choreographer had sent me a video of her doing various things that she wanted to work into the piece. She conceived the entire work as "the growth of a society from infancy to its full maturity," but also reflected the way the individual grew from birth through the experiences of life. She sent me choreographic gestures that she thought would indicate what she was trying to show in the piece, and then I began with those gestures and found sounds on the Casio that I thought would go with those gestures and turned those into a *Suite*, a dance piece.

Another piece that is going to be performed is the earliest one that I wrote when I was still in college, in 1969. It is a setting of the first poem of Carmina Burana, "O Fortuna". But I wanted to do it in a style completely unlike Orff. It's kind of a Penderecki-ish approach to that text. There is a funny story behind that one too: as I was an undergraduate at Duquesne University, I had a sweetheart who is actually now my wife of 46 years. She was the director of their sorority Greek-sing. Of course, all of the other sororities were doing show pop tunes, and then we came with this crazy and weird "Oh Fortuna" piece. It just blew everybody away! And those girls who couldn't really even read music somehow just spent hours and hours learning how to do 5/16 time. The entire concept of the piece is to take the text and turn it into a 5/16; little pulses of five that they had to spout out in Latin very quickly and do all sorts of glissandos and clusters, etc. So, I'm told that the women's part of the chorus will be doing that on the concert. I'm really excited to hear that again.

NB: *We are very much looking forward to the performances of your pieces. But your compositions aside, what do you think you have gained from being an SCI member throughout these 35 years?*

DF: First and foremost, connections. There is a real-estate saying, "it's about location, location, location." I really think composing is all about "connection, connection, connection," getting to know and meet lot of people, getting to find out about what's going on around the country. The great thing about SCI is that is not just a NY or West coast institution; it

covers the whole country. There are a lot of wonderful composers, performers and institutions that I've become acquainted with through SCI meetings. It's kind of funny that when I first started with ASUC they had a reputation for being kind of snobby and academic. People would get together and criticize each other's music behind each other's backs. I had heard these reputations about what terrible people composers were. Then I actually met composers and found out what goes on at these conferences, and the fact that composers are just the greatest people in the world. They are the most un-self-centered people, wanting to find out what other people are doing, wanting to communicate, wanting to take part of a big society. We have a certain kind of camaraderie and brotherhood/sisterhood of composers that come together, a family. That's maybe what I think is most important thing SCI offers. It's great for young composers to get themselves recognized, to hear other young composers, have people hear their work and to find out what other people are doing. I think if a young composer doesn't have this kind of support, I don't know where they would turn. It's hard to get recognition and get performances and that's what SCI provides not only for young composers, but also for us old folks. It's really good to find that friends and people you've known for years are still there and they are still writing great music.

But also just learning a lot of music, learning what composers are doing, the performances, the scores, the CDs. Beyond the connections you make, there is also a lot of information from the world of music and what's happening with compositions today, in such events.

NB: *Being a professor for many years, what general advice do you have for composers at the beginning of their careers?*

DF: Yes. Well, it's a difficult, different and uncertain time. Trying to predict the future of any kind of music is really difficult. And we don't really know where things are going. So you can't rely on the old strategies, the old formats. That's about the only thing I can say with assurance. What I can't say is what particular strategy to pursue. I think everyone has to find their own way to deal with what the future might bring as composers. I think it is very important to be aware of all the stuff that is going on, to try to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, and to be conscious of opportunities. It is important

for composers to get online and look for what is happening and to try to figure out how you might be able to fit your special talent and view of what you'd like to do as a composer into those kinds of opportunities.

NB: *Do you believe being a part of academia is pertinent to succeed in a career in music?*

DF: Yes. I think it's very important. I think we need to assert more forcibly as academics that what we do in music is maybe the most important thing that we can actually offer the world. There is an awful lot of music out there that is dumbed-down and the result of all of this dumbed down music is a dumbed-down culture, a dumbed-down society. I think we have to feel that this is not what the human being is aspiring towards. As humans, the most important things we have, which distinguish us from machines and animals, is that we are creative. We can come up with new, fresh and exciting ideas, which drive us in our lives. So much of what is passing as music these days is simply without any ideas, without any personality, without any engagement of our creativity and our intellectual capacities. I think that composers may have in some bad way contributed to the idea that we are not really interested in the public or we are not interested in emotions. But that is a total misconception and we have to prove this with our music. The more creative, innovative, individual and idea-driven our music is, the more meaningful, exciting and emotionally-potent it is to the listener and to our culture as a whole.

NB: *Thinking about "music entrepreneurship," what advice would you give the emerging composers in terms of innovative paths that they can take to establish successful careers?*

DF: I have a dual answer to that question. First: you have to look around and find what things you can apply your skills towards. So, trying to find something that is right for you and probably nobody else knows about, because these things are so niche oriented. Society is so splintered up into so many different kinds of activities that we have to really search to try and find how we can fit into it. Second: we actually need to create or rebuild a niche of people who are really interested in musical excitement and creativity. The kinds of things we love about Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky and Bartok, for example, are so important to us and have so much meaning in our lives

that we want to make sure our listeners are getting the kind of music from us which will convince them this is how they want to spend their time. Their precious moments of listening to music shouldn't be wasted on music that is insipid or the music that only gives them what marketing agents think they need to listen to. We have a responsibility as composers to change society.

Author Biography

Navid Bargrizan is a Ph.D. fellow in historical musicology at the University of Florida, pursuing a cognate in composition. While he has presented his research in several international and national conferences, his papers are published in Berlin, Istanbul, and soon in the spring 2015 issue of Müzik-Bilim Dergisi, The Journal of Musicology. As a composer, Navid experiments with microtones, tunings, tone systems, and intonations. His music is performed in the USA, Germany, and Italy. He has received awards such as a 2015 DAAD German Studies scholarship and University of Florida's College of Arts 2015 Best of College Creative Research Award for his 10 Aphorisms for Saxophone Duo.

NEW HORIZONS FOR STUDENT MEMBERS

New Horizons for Student Members The Business with Composers

by Ian Guthrie

My college education has enriched my skills in so many subjects, yet one skill that my schools never taught me was self-promotion. In my childhood I dreamed of "composing for a living," thinking all I had to do was write good pieces and people would flock to hear my music. (Those were the days when the internet was in its infancy, YouTube was simply a virtual home video resource, and Amazon was only a bookseller. Remember?)

However, as I began to taste more of the real world and read more biographies, I realized only a handful of the most exceptional composers survive (or ever did) exclusively writing original works. I realized that most composers work as musicians in other capacities, often pruning their compositional skills in the process. Today's technological advancements add a whole new dimension to my findings. In fact, as far as I can tell, self-promotion is the biggest factor in a composer's fate: look at how easily one can post their compositions online, without any credentials. While a composer's institution is also important, it must be stated that no school's reputation substitutes one's proactivity. In other words, I think composers need to be acutely aware of the music market and their

niche within it, not just where they got their degree. This essay explains the various musical occupations and solutions I have compiled relevant to our digital age.

Many composers make their actual living as soloists, accompanists, or ensemble members at formal and informal venues, which broadens their repertoire and expands their knowledge of instrumental and compositional techniques. In fact, from before Machaut and until Beethoven, all musicians learned performance, theory, and composition. Until Beethoven, then, there did not exist the big concept of a composer as opposed to a performer or conductor. With that in mind, why not pick up your favorite instrument and tell the coffee shop down the street or the beautiful lodge in town that you've got the chops they need?

Others conduct, which increases opportunities to program their chamber (and sometimes large ensemble) works. Wagner, Mahler, Boulez, Whitacre and countless other composers have made careers as conductors. The author argues that conducting remains an essential skill for all composers, especially those who wish to write for any orchestral combination. The orchestra has such a large repertoire these days that relatively

few maestros care to tackle “new music”. Why not express ensemble music with our interpretations just as maestros and virtuosos do?

Still others arrange for specific ensembles, which can lead to writing original compositions for those same ensembles later. The average composer today (including myself) can attest that it is exponentially easier to recruit players for a small ensemble work than for a large ensemble (this cannot be overstated). For example, when I recruited a 20-player sinfonietta for one of my compositions, I spent probably double or triple the time recruiting the performers as I did honing the composition. Conversely, many composers remained successful writing almost exclusively solo and chamber music. Gabriel Fauré, in particular, disliked writing large ensemble works, and scholars almost unanimously agree that he did not even orchestrate his legendary *Requiem*.¹ Why not take advantage of the intimacy and practicality of a beautiful chamber group? Why not create an unusual instrumentation?

And then the obvious: many composers teach composition and/or instrumental lessons, usually privately or in K-12 settings, since only about one in four doctorates ever achieve a professorship.² Yet private lessons can be a lucrative income, particularly in ritzy suburbs, and thankfully, there are so many composers that teach at some capacity today that it would be futile to compile any list. Another benefit of teaching is that teachers often learn from students. We all learn from others, whether we know it or not, so why not pass down the tradition and continue learning simultaneously?

In addition, composers who want their music to be heard actively grow their supportive network. Such composers create an online presence—especially in their early stages of promotion—since most people search for music and musicians online. The most professional tool is a personal website, which costs little or nothing today. Composers also present their own compositions to soloists and ensembles, especially ones within their network and those that lack substantial repertoire (the bass trombone, tuba, and tuned percussion are good examples). Nearly all composers join composition organizations, like ASCAP, BMI, SCI or SEAMUS, all of which regularly hold conferences where composers can hear new music, discover new opportunities, and establish new connections. Composers

must be willing to say “yes” to opportunities, including the unappealing ones. Furthermore, many composers with whom I have discussed this topic actively remain in contact with their network (often via social networks like Facebook), and tactfully expand it (usually through e-mail in conjunction with a sample of their work). I think all composers—including students—should aim to establish a large enough network that they can write most of their works with a performer and tentative performance already in place. Ultimately, those who get consistent performances have created good impressions that led to the best and fastest form of promotion: word-of-mouth.

One unreliable source of income is royalties from music streaming sites. Various people of all backgrounds post articles daily on the fact that streaming music does not make composers any money. Recently, Kevin Kadish made \$5,679 from 178 million streams on his hit “All About That Bass.”³ For now, among all the options to make money as a composer, the music streaming industry is not one of them. However, it is too early to tell what the future of streaming will be. For example, Ben Sisario in the New York Times recently wrote about an artist who came to fame (though not necessarily riches) through Spotify;⁴ additionally, Glenn Peoples on Billboard informed the music world that YouTube recently launched a paid subscription service.⁵ How about keeping an eye on the streaming business in case it becomes another revenue source?

Finally, concerning school choice, I recommend you check out Mark Phillips’ and David Smooke’s article “Choosing a Graduate School in Music Composition”⁶ or Frank Bruni’s interview “Where You Go Is Not Who You’ll Be.”⁷ Everyone told me that I had to decide for myself how important a prestigious alma mater would be, and I think these authors would share that sentiment.

Music is still a viable occupation for tenacious musicians, including composers. True, many make it financially through performing, conducting, and/or teaching (and maybe even streaming services) in conjunction with attending conferences and maintaining an online presence, but such jobs allow them to continue composing regularly. Therefore, I encourage you to go out, find your niche, and promote yourself.

Author Biography

Ian Guthrie (b. 1992) began composing at the age of nine and is quickly emerging as one of America's upcoming young composers. He has won 1st prize in the Texas MTNA Young Artist Composition Competition (2015) and the WSMTA Young Composers competitions (2006-9), 3rd prize in the Webster Young Composers Competition (3rd prize, 2008), and is a two-time finalist in the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composers Competition. In addition, many of his works have been performed publicly around the nation from groups such as fEARnoMUSIC, Portland's Metropolitan Youth Symphony, the Northwest Symphony Orchestra, the Moore Philharmonic Orchestra, March Music Moderne, the Charlotte New Music Festival, the Clear Creek Music Festival, the Oregon Bach Festival, and the 2014 Pierrot Lunaire Project.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Harold Schoenberg, "Chromaticism and Sensibilité" in *The Lives of the Great Composers*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. & W. Norton, 1997); Tim Rutherford-Johnson et al., "Fauré's Requiem" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), etc.

² Jordan Weissman, "How Many Ph. D.'s Actually Get to Become College Professors," *The Atlantic*, 23 Feb., 2013, <http://theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/02/how-many-phds-actually-get-to-become-college-professors/273434/>.

³ Nate Rau, "'All About That Bass' Writer Decries Streaming Revenue," *Tennessean*, 22 Sept., 2015, <http://tennessean.com/story/money/industries/music/2015/09/22/all-bass-writer-decries-streaming-revenue/72570464/>.

⁴ Ben Sisario, "Independent Musicians Find Unexpected Rewards in Streaming," *New York Times*, 22 Oct., 2015, <http://nytimes.com/2015/10/23/business/media/independent-musicians-find-unexpected-rewards-in-streaming.html>.

⁵ Glenn Peoples, "Apple Music, YouTube Red Mark a Momentous Week for Digital Music," *Billboard*, 22 Oct., 2015, <http://billboard.com/articles/business/6738168/apple-music-youtube-red-momentous-week-digital-music>.

⁶ Mark Phillips and David Smooke, "Choosing a Graduate School in Music Composition," *Society of Composers, Inc.*, <http://societyofcomposers.org/students/gradschool.html>.

⁷ Frank Bruni and Diane Rehm, "Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania", *Diane Rehm Show*, 16 Mar., 2015, <http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2015-03-16/frank-bruni-where-you-go-is-not-who-youll-be-an-antidote-to-the-college-admissions-mania>.