



# Society of Composers, Inc.

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

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## 2016 Mid-Missouri Composers Symposium

By Michael Murray with contributions from Kerrith Livengood

*"We have you staying in the bland house."* I had just arrived at the Arts Center in Belle, MO, having picked up the special order "In C(ake)" from Piece of Cake Bakery in Nixa a few hours earlier. Eleven composers from across the US were gathering in Belle to take part in the 2016 Mid-Missouri Composers Symposium hosted by the Osage Arts Community. Most of us did not know quite what to expect from the Symposium. My image of the "bland house" was not particularly inviting, with the names of other OAC spaces I had heard, such as "River House" and "House on the Hill," sounding more attractive.

Mark McClane, Executive Director of OAC, arrived at the Center to guide us to our living and working spaces for the week. McClane is an incredibly passionate and dedicated arts advocate whose vision and energy are transforming Belle and the surrounding community into a truly special place for artists. As we drove a few miles to a neighboring town, we discovered the "bland house" was actually a beautiful older home located in Bland, MO. A local couple, the Sassmanns, had generously allowed the Symposium to



*MMCS 2016 Group Picture*

use their private home for the week, offering plenty of living and working space for the four composers housed there. As McClane showed us around the house, we noticed the bin full of snacks on the kitchen counter (*"Artists need access to nourishment at any time of day."*) and the refrigerator full of



## About the Newsletter

**Editor:** Michael Rene Torres  
**Assistant Editors:** Carter John Rice & Brad Decker

**Access:** available on the SCI website at <http://www.societyofcomposers.org/publications/newsletter/>

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The SCI Newsletter is a bi-monthly publication which serves the SCI membership by publishing materials pertaining to the field of composition and contemporary music culture including: history, pedagogy, philosophy, opinion, current events, interdisciplinary connections, etc. Specifically, the types of articles published are blog or academic style articles, interviews, album reviews, concert/conference reviews, etc. The views and opinions expressed in articles published by the SCI Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Society of Composers, Inc.

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## Upcoming SCI Events

**2016 SCI Student National Conference**  
**November 17-19, 2016**  
 Ball State University  
 Carter Rice, Co-host  
 Chad Powers, Co-host

**2017 Region IV Student Conference**  
**January, 26-27, 2017**  
 University of North Carolina Greensboro  
 Elise Seifert, Host

**2017 Region VI Conference**  
**February 2-4, 2017**  
 The University of Texas at Arlington  
 Dan Cavanagh, Host

**2017 SCI Region VIII Conference**  
**March 1-14, 2017**  
 Washington State University  
 Ryan M. Hare, Host

**2017 SCI National Conference**  
**March 30-April 1, 2017**  
 Western Michigan University  
 Christopher Biggs, Co-host  
 Lisa Coons, Co-host  
 Richard Johnson, Co-host

**2017 Region VII Conference**  
**September 29-30, 2017**  
 Arizona State University  
 Jody Rockmaker, Host



## Internet & Email

[www.societyofcomposers.org](http://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](mailto: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>

## National Council

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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.

## Executive Committee

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groceries for our use.

Organized for the second year by composer Nolan Stolz (University of South Carolina-Upstate), the 2016 MMCS took place from July 24-30 with composers of varied backgrounds and experience. Stolz invited me, along with Eric Honour (University of Central Missouri) and Matt Sargent (Bard College), to join him in the core group of participants. Seven more composers were accepted based on application to the Symposium. These were Jason Charney (Baltimore, MD), Jeff Herriott (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater), Kerrith Livengood (University of Illinois), David McIntire (Missouri Western State University), Brian Penkrot (University of Northern Illinois), Kyle Shaw (University of Illinois), and 2015 MMCS alumnus Andrew Walters (Mansfield University, PA).



MMCS Cake

Upon her arrival in Belle, Livengood noticed the top-notch frozen custard stand (Bob's) located two doors down from the Arts Center. *"I followed Mark McClane in his enormous truck, driving several miles down winding dirt and gravel roads, past woods and cow pastures and eventually through a rocky creek to Hollis and Pam Sturdy's farm. Like the other composers, I was housed in a quiet, comfortable house with a kitchen full of snacks. The farmhouse was on a hill looking over the rolling woods and pastures for several miles. By the end of the week, I had dodged several deer, rabbits, turtles, and cows driving to and from the Arts Center, and there was a solid inch of dirt covering the back of my*

*car."* The other composer participants were assigned to various residential spaces in and around the Arts Center in Belle, the Sturdy farm just north of town, and the OAC farm located along the Gasconade River about eight miles from Belle.

MMCS is a unique blend of a traditional artist residency and a composers' conference. The stated purpose of the Symposium is *"to gather a strong group of composers to learn from one another, to inspire, and to provide a place to compose, all within a relaxing and informal environment."* The format of the Symposium consists of public presentations by the composer participants on their own music, roundtable discussions on topics ranging from compositional process to the various roles composers take on in society and academia, plenty of free time for creative work, and activities that encouraged interaction with the local culture and residents. When asked about his motivation for organizing the event, Stolz said, *"I love going to the Osage Arts Community. I was in residence there for three consecutive summers, and during my third residency in 2014 I thought it would be great to share it with other composers. I had been to composer conferences and festivals where everyone is so busy with putting their performances together (rehearsals, revising or correcting scores and parts, etc.), that there is not enough time to have in-depth conversations with other composers and performers. I decided to create a symposium that does not include performances so the focus can be on discussions. Many of the participants are at schools where they are the only composer on faculty, or one of only two or three. MMCS gives them the opportunity to have high level, discipline-specific discussions with other professionals."*

OAC Executive Director McClane told me one of his motivations for hosting the Symposium was that he wanted to provide academic composers an opportunity to witness firsthand the type of small-town community from which many of our students come. While in town, the group ate local food ranging from the previously mentioned Bob's Frozen Custard to fabulous fried chicken and catfish to authentic Spanakopita at Belle restaurants J&J's, That Greek Place, the Dinner Belle, and Chuck Wagon. Walking and driving around town and speaking with the locals was an essential part of the experience.

MMCS participants spent abundant morning free time working on their own projects or interacting with the other composers and/or OAC artists-in-residence. Jeff Herriott

recalled, *"I was staying in the guest house of Hollis and Pam Sturdy, whose farm lay down a windy dirt road a couple miles outside of the center of town. Every morning, I would get up, make myself a cup of coffee, and sit on the back porch to listen to the sound of almost nothing. After a few lovely, quiet moments, I found it easy to start composing."* Livengood added, *"I really enjoyed going for a morning run, usually scaring a bunch of cows as I went by, and then getting to work composing. In the afternoons, it was a nice change of pace to sit down for group discussions of a variety of topics."*

The Osage Arts Community provides programming at the Arts Center and other locations in Belle, as well as a comprehensive residency program for creative artists – composers, poets, visual artists, fiction and non-fiction writers – at its setting on the northern edge of the Ozarks in central Missouri. The residencies, generally lasting several weeks to several months, are designed to help individual artists and collaborative teams to focus on their work and creative development. Check out the OAC web site (<http://osageac.org/>) to keep up-to-date about all of the incredible and essential work they are doing to support our art.

During the Symposium, two painters and a poet were also in residence at OAC. McClane gave the group of composers a tour around the various living spaces and studios currently in use by OAC residents, including the painting studios of Greg Edmonson and Josh Crow, so we could see some of the work the artists have been doing during their residencies. He also took us to several houses and buildings in Belle that the OAC has recently acquired or is in the process of acquiring and renovating. His plans include increasing the number and type of artists the OAC can host at any given time as well as adding a theater and performing arts center to the growing community. These additional spaces will allow for the expansion of the OAC to include theater, dance, and other collaborative, creative, and performing activities. McClane has a long term vision to help revitalize Belle's economy through the establishment of an international community of creative and performing artists, all with connections to Belle and the Ozarks.

Afternoons generally consisted of "topics" discussions with the group. Themes were submitted by the participants beforehand, and these topics covered various facets of composing and being a composer. This intense interaction

with other composers provided inspiration and a sense of community within the group. Herriott remarked, *"One of the many things I appreciated about the week was how committed all of the guest composers were to the symposium's format. Conversations were friendly, but we got to some interesting places. As an academic who doesn't have too many composer colleagues at my institution (or even any graduate students), I relished the opportunity to have focused conversations on topics as simple as recent listening lists and as challenging as how to tackle the lack of diversity in our field."*

Most evenings were spent at the "river house" on the OAC farm. The farm is located immediately adjacent to the Gasconade River, allowing for informal interaction while swimming or sitting in the river, throwing sticks for dogs to fetch, or just relaxing and enjoying the natural beauty of the place. Fabulous dinners were prepared and served by Tony Hayden, Executive Secretary and principal benefactor of the OAC. These were the times when the group tended to get especially nerdy, either discussing prog rock or current trends in technology, or cutting into the cake that had the score of Terry Riley's "In C" represented in frosting across the top.

Most of the week was spent working and discussing music at the Arts Center or in the studios, but several optional excursions were arranged. Some of the participants travelled to the nearby town of Owensville to attend the Gasconade County Fair and its demolition derby. The following day, a group drove up to Columbia, MO to attend rehearsals of new music ensemble Alarm Will Sound as they prepared for



*MMCS 2016 Honour Presentation*

their concert performance during the Mizzou International Composers Festival. The final stunning Saturday evening was spent at the Wenwood Farm Winery for drinks and live music.



*MMCS 2016 Round Table*

Livengood commented, *"The entire residency-symposium was an excellent balance of time spent, and it was well integrated into the town of Belle and surrounding community. Overall it was a wonderful time, combining summer in the Ozarks with stimulating discussions with the opportunity to work on professional projects."* Speaking for myself, I cannot remember a single week in my career as a composer in which I accomplished so much creative work. MMCS organizer Stolz and the OAC staff were incredibly thoughtful in providing time, space, food, fellowship, and relaxation, which helped us all to "get in the zone" to be productive as composers.

The selection process as described by Stolz emphasizes variety and compatibility. *"We chose composers we thought could engage in the discussions in meaningful ways. We've had senior faculty, junior faculty, recent graduates, and graduate students as participants, contributing different areas of expertise and levels of experience. When deciding which composers to invite we tried to achieve balance in style/aesthetic and genre as well. For example, some have been more modernist while others more minimalist, and some have worked mostly in the electronic realm with others mostly in acoustic music."*

Fellow composers, be sure to keep an eye out for next year's call for participation and consider taking part in the 2017 Mid-Missouri Composers Symposium. The 2016 MMCS was a valuable and wonderful experience all around.

*Reviewers have praised composer **Michael Murray** as "a contemporary craftsman-artist of original stripe" and "a master at writing for the human voice." His music has been described as "well crafted," "expertly and adroitly handled," and "easy to listen to in the best possible way." Murray's compositions have been performed and recorded across the United States and Europe, featured in venues in Cuba, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, the Czech Republic, over 20 different states and the District of Columbia. In addition to works for the concert hall, he has written music for film, theater productions, dance, and visual arts installations. His music has been recorded for [Navona Records](#) and is published by [Ars Nova Press](#). He lives in Springfield, Missouri, where he is professor of music, teaching composition and music theory at [Missouri State University](#). For more information, visit his web site at [www.michaelmurraymusic.com](http://www.michaelmurraymusic.com)*



*Murray Michael*