

NEMFA Orchestra Report

June 2020 Bulletin

The 2020 NEMFA Orchestra was made up of students from thirty different sponsors across New England. Although they did not have the opportunity to meet in person, each student's invitation to be part of the ensemble still represents a significant musical accomplishment, and these students – and their teachers and families – are to be commended for their preparation and dedication to their art. In a typical year, these students would soak up as much as they could from the festival experience, and hopefully carry a spark of inspiration and leadership back to their home ensembles.

The seventy-eight musicians of the NEMFA Orchestra, along with their counterparts in the Chorus and Band, did not get that opportunity this year. In French, the word “ensemble” means “together;” the days since March have seen us collectively be anything BUT “together.” Yet, while we have, in most cases, been forced to be physically apart, I still see these young musicians as having the potential to be the spark. Over four hundred students would have come to Hanover, but beyond each of these students are scores of others who performed at the Solo and Ensemble Festival and fell short of the cut-off score for an invitation. Radiating out from these students – all of whom I consider NEMFA participants – are countless others who were not yet ready for the S&E Festival. Less experienced students, younger students, perhaps, to be blunt, simply lazier students – yet, even still, they are musicians. Musicians who, at whatever level, are fundamentally creative, not destructive. Musicians who, at whatever level, bring some measure of harmony to the world, some measure of beauty to the world. Musicians who, however remotely they may be practicing right now, are still part of our musical community. As ever, music shows us the way to get through trying times – through the joy of shared effort, through creating, through working together...as a grand New England ensemble.

My thanks go to our would-have-been hosts in Hanover. At every turn, they were fantastic to work with in laying the groundwork for this year's festival. To the entire community who worked on it – teachers, parents, host families, students – I hope that we will be able to return in a future year. My thanks to all the directors, teachers, and students who were selected for the orchestra; I hope that the time you spent in preparing the repertoire still provided you an opportunity for musical growth, even without the ultimate satisfaction of giving a performance. My thanks to our guest conductor, Allen Tinkham, who selected an outstanding program, and would surely have offered an unforgettable experience to our students.

This brings me to laying out the plans for next year's 2021 festival, and I am pleased to announce that our guest conductor will in fact be the same as this year's! I am so grateful for the flexibility shown by Allen Tinkham, whose biography is below. He has been understanding and accommodating throughout the entire process, from planning to cancelling to rescheduling. Thanks are also due to Dr. Brian Norcross, who was scheduled to be the conductor for 2021, for his willingness to defer his appearance with the NEMFA Orchestra to 2022. We intend to use the same program next year, so students, if you're not graduating, I hope you will work extra-hard on preparing your S&E performance so that we can invite you back to perform the works you studied for this year! There's no time like the present to start working on those S&E pieces, and after all, most of us have plenty of time on our hands at the moment.

Though I have written before about the music on the coming program, it is worth repeating. We will open with “The Machine Awakes,” an electro-acoustic composition written by Steven Bryant in 2013. Working with electronics is a new technique for the NEMFA orchestra, and fits with the conductor's reputation for “Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music.” The largest work on the program is the first movement of the “Symphony No. 1 in E Minor” by Florence Price. Price is a composer who is likely to be unfamiliar to many students and directors; according to Tinkham, she is noted as the first African-American woman to be recognized as a symphonic composer and the first to have a composition played by a major orchestra. The symphony we will perform comes from 1932; while it definitely contains echoes of Dvorak's “New World Symphony,” it is in no way derivative, creating a sonic world uniquely its own. The closing piece on the program is Franz von Suppé's “Light Cavalry Overture.” Although the operetta for which it was written is rarely performed, this 1866 overture contains many familiar melodies and may be Suppé's best-known work.

This program covers a variety of time periods and styles; there are exquisite moments for every section of the orchestra, and numerous solo opportunities throughout the ensemble. I hope you will share this repertoire with your students, and get them excited about taking part. Although these past few months have been trying, and we do not have a clear picture of the road ahead, I hope that everybody reading this will have the chance to recharge over the summer. Whatever the future holds, whatever the next year looks like, we musicians will adapt our teaching and learning to serve our students and communities, to help light the way in dark days, to help make the world a little better, to feed the spirits of those we care for. This is the power of our art, and no viral outbreak or social upheaval will ever be able to silence us. Best wishes to all, and as always, if you have any comments, questions, complaints, or suggestions regarding the NEMFA orchestra, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

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Allen Tinkham is increasingly recognized as one of the most inspiring and exciting conductors and teachers of his generation. He is hailed by the Chicago Tribune as both a conductor and teacher, described as working “wonders” conducting with “uncanny control” and as one of Chicago’s most important “educators, mentors and inspirational guides in the training of tomorrow’s orchestral professionals.”

As the Music Director of the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras (CYSO), Tinkham oversees artistic programming and faculty and leads the Symphony Orchestra each season including appearances at Orchestra Hall in Symphony Center and Pritzker Pavilion at Millennium Park. Tinkham led the orchestra in its Carnegie Hall debut, first live broadcast, first recording release, and six international tours on four continents.

Since Tinkham joined CYSO, programs have tripled and the budget has doubled. CYSO’s Symphony Orchestra is regularly broadcast by WFMT and

has received numerous Illinois Council of Orchestras Youth Orchestra of the Year and Programming of the Year awards. The orchestra is internationally acclaimed as “one of the country’s most famous youth outfits.” (Muso Magazine) John von Rhein of the Chicago Tribune said of their recent performance of Varèse’s *Amériques*, the first ever by an American youth orchestra, “The performance would have done credit to an adult professional orchestra.”

As an advocate and champion of contemporary music, Tinkham has won nine American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers National Awards for Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music (ASCAP). Tinkham is also the Music Director of the Chicago Composers Orchestra, Chicago’s only professional orchestra performing exclusively the works of living composers.

In high demand as a guest conductor and educator, Tinkham has conducted summer festivals and NAFME All-State Orchestras throughout the U.S. including the All-Eastern and All-Northwest Orchestras. He was the Assistant Conductor for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s holiday concerts for six seasons, and he has guest conducted the Colorado Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, and the Members of Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Tinkham attended the Eastman School of Music, University of Michigan School of Music, and American Academy of Conducting of the Aspen Music Festival. He was invited to the 14th International Nicolai Malko Competition and the 4th International Conductors Competition Sir Georg Solti and is a laureate of the League of American Orchestras Bruno Walter Conductor Preview.

Tinkham began his career as Apprentice Conductor at the Oregon Symphony and before the end of his apprenticeship was appointed Music Director of CYSO—the youngest to win the post in its history.