

Instructional Related Activities
Report Form

SPONSOR	DEPARTMENT
Jerry Clifford	Physics

ACTIVITY TITLE	DATE (S) OF ACTIVITY
New West Symphony concert for Physics of Music class	November 11, 2011

E-mail to the Dean's Office
30 days after activity



The Physics of Music course is designed to give a useful and fun understanding of music and sound for general education, physics and performing arts students interested in music and speech. The format includes lectures, demonstrations, and hands-on activities. After covering the basic foundations of sounds and music, the students investigate each musical instrument group, including percussion, plucked strings, bowed strings, air pipes, reed instruments, horns and the human voice. To enhance the course, we wanted to expose students to a professional orchestra's live performance.

Description of Activity:

Our Physics of Music students attended New West Symphony concerts in Oxnard on November 11, 2011. Most of our students had never seen a professional orchestra performing a live concert. The New West Symphony is local and very high caliber. They play recognizable classical pieces as well as music by new composers. The

students heard in concert the instruments they have studied in class. Students are more familiar with rock concerts that incorporate different musical instruments. Hopefully, this was a memorable introduction for students to a lifetime of music appreciation beyond the rock concerts.

The concert was particularly memorable because the guest conductor, Sarah Ioannides, was the first female to lead the New West Symphony. Ioannides, who is from Australia, is music director of the Spartanburg Philharmonic in South Carolina. Being from Australia, she chose a new work by Australian composer Matthew Hindson, Violin Concerto No. 1, "Australian Postcards." This was the West Coast premiere of the exuberant piece with three movements as musical postcards of Australia, a symphonic triptych of his homeland. The young Canadian violin soloist, Lara St. John, was amazing. The LA Times wrote "Lara St. John happens to be a volcanic violinist with a huge, fabulous tone that pours out of her like molten lava. She has technique to burn and plays at a constant high heat. She is uninhibited, sometimes strikingly so.... She is the closest equivalent to a Janis Joplin on the current classical concert scene." The front row seating for the students provided an exceptional view as she played. Some students commented that they could see broken bow hairs fly as she attacked her instrument and played at a frenetic pace, as seen in the photo below.



The concert balanced the modern concerto with two classical pieces, Debussy's "La Mer" and Stravinsky's "Suite for the Firebird". Most of the students found La Mer to be too slow for their rock-acclimated ears, though one student said it was her favorite. The Stravinsky piece was exciting and provided opportunities for many instruments to stand out above the orchestra, particularly the woodwinds and horns. Most of the students moved for the second half of the concert from the front row to the rear of the

auditorium where they could see the entire orchestra better and identify the individual instruments visually as well as acoustically.

Fourteen students attended the concert, many bringing student friends to share the experience.

This activity was not a field trip because the choice of a concert and venue was up to the students, and they could go any time prior to the report due date. We offered, however, a great deal on group-discount tickets, thanks to the IRA support.

Activity Related to Course:

This project directly supports the Physics of Music course, by expanding the class presentation on instruments to an exciting live performance. The many instruments, which they studied individually, are integrated into one unit. Many of the instruments, like the violin, trumpet, flute, clarinet, oboe and timpani, had been covered in class but many other instruments were only mentioned, like the cello, double bass, bassoon, piccolo, French horn, trombone, cymbal, and many percussion instruments. The students also saw how the conductor led the orchestra through her movements and directions to play in a coordinated manner. Several students commented that seeing the violins play in unison, including their bowing, was amazing.

Learned from Activity:

After the concert, the students wrote a paper for course credit about the concert. The reports described the specific instruments and the combined sounds observed and evaluated the student interest. The paper addressed four points:

- What musical instruments were particularly interesting and why?
- What new musical instruments did they notice?
- Describe their impressions of the combined sounds of the symphony.
- What did they like about a live symphony performance? What did they learn from it?

Most students thought the symphony performance was outstanding. The students were amazed by the fullness of the sounds and the complexity of the playing. Most students were interested in the role of the conductor at the performance. The students all agreed that the concert was an excellent way to culminate the class.

Seeing a professional orchestra was a wonderful experience for our students. The New West Symphony has been trying for years to establish a relationship with the University and they were very excited to that our Physics of Music class included a symphonic performance in our curriculum.

Accounting:

Sandy Galin of the NWS office offered \$10 group tickets, which is much less than the normal single-seat ticket prices of \$78. The students originally had to pay \$10 per ticket, but after the symphony I reimbursed them the full cost. I found that student do not show up if they don't have any "skin in the game". I reimbursed the full cost because we did not have the full number of 24 students per semester that we had planned for. Students did pay for their guests. Students also paid for their own transportation and parking.

Eleven students attended the concert:

The total cost for the eleven student tickets was \$110. Three students brought student friends. The receipt below includes the cost of the eleven course students, the three guests and two tickets for me and my spouse. We had requested \$240 of IRA funding for the New West Symphony for two semesters. The actual cost was \$110, which was paid on my Visa credit card. The Physics of Music course was not offered in the Spring 2012 semester as planned so there was no cost for that semester.

Conclusion:

The New West Symphony remains a valuable part for the Physics of Music course and I hope IRA support will continue to give our CSU Channel Islands the opportunity to attend concerts as part of future Physics of Music courses.



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