

## Nicholas Naegele



When asked what I enjoy about playing with the Kalamazoo Symphony, a whole herd of thoughts stampede to the front of my mind: the overwhelming sense of unity when we perform a well-coordinated phrase together; the sheer experiential impact the sound carries through the group and the audience; witnessing the expertise of my colleagues--their distinct musical personalities and subtly-colored blends, all following Maestro Harvey's graciously refined yet strongly expressive direction; the top-tier guest artists, both those I've admired for years and those I'm thrilled to encounter anew; the receptive audience, attentive, embracing works of all kinds....

That's all as it should be: the performance, the playing, the work itself is the first joy the job brings, the first enjoyment to mind.

Yet I find over time a more enduring quality distinguishes my life in the Kalamazoo Symphony: a surprisingly enthusiastic sense of community and purpose that rises above everyday cynicism and drudgery, often coming off as a quietly ebullient joie de vivre. This is NOT to say the musicians and staff aren't sarcastic--the KSO's workplace humor tends to balance strict sarcasm with wry observation and gleeful silliness/absurdity. Rather, I mean to say that in my experience the members of the orchestra and staff tend to make efforts to get to know each other as friends, not just faces to pass or sit beside onstage--and they tend to be receptive to efforts from each other in the same vein.

Perhaps my position in the orchestra colors my view: I'm one of the section second violinists, meaning my job generally involves combining forces with my fellow second violinists to produce a single blended sound to add to the larger orchestral soundscape--a single color on the palette, but a color made from a myriad of smaller colors, intentionally combined. The second violinists also tend to play fewer- and less-extroverted parts than the first violinists--we usually take a more supportive/harmonic role as opposed to a leading/melodic role. In other words, my job focuses more on collective contribution than individual contribution.

As befits the section and my description before, Kalamazoo's second violinists are a fairly good-humored, friendly bunch with healthy doses of self-assurance and self-deprecation. Though not necessarily out-going, we do fall on the more open, transparent end of the personality spectrum. We communicate constantly, whether exchanging vital performance details, questions, inside jokes, or important news, and we look out for each other if things seem off. Our section leader epitomizes this ethos, maintaining a rather amazing attention for both the performance needs of the section and the personalities of the individual players.

Still, I know this culture extends well beyond the second violinists. I've been thoroughly surprised to find myself hanging out at Shawarma King, Sweetwater's Donut Mill, Bell's Eccentric Cafe, the Crow's Nest, and so many other places all hours of night and day with instrumentalists of every stripe, discussing everything from food, skydiving, Halloween costumes, and tv shows to common teachers, hammered dulcimers, life goals,

and the mathematical mapping of Indian ragas . Where else have I found myself staring up at the stars on separate, multiple occasions, talking about the wonders of life with different players holding entirely different life philosophies? Though I've gotten to know several individuals in my other orchestras, I've only rarely had the opportunity to know so many so thoroughly.\*

All this relationship-building produces trust, wider avenues of communication, greater investment in each other, and--perhaps most importantly--real understanding. These factors become incredibly important in an orchestral setting, where musicians need to constantly work together, communicating the good, the bad, and everything in between. When you know each other and place real value in each other and your relationships, then this communication becomes an inspiring, confirming process that adds to the personal meaning of the work as a whole and gives the players greater opportunity to bring out the things of value they find in a piece. In other words, it helps us find and express the true worth of a piece to each other and our audience. Even when our communication turns to sarcastic goofiness, the shared sense of community it adds to helps us accomplish our serious goals. That clear sense of community and purpose is something truly special--something I know I won't find every place I go--and so I recognize it and treasure it as part of my time and my life shared with my colleagues here in Kalamazoo.

\*To this end, I must express my deep appreciation for all the host families who've housed me and so many others here in the Kalamazoo area. Forming a symphony with members from Madison to Cleveland and beyond is no mean task, but hosts' willingness to open their homes to us has helped make it possible. Their inexpressible generosity has furthered the lives and work of the Kalamazoo Symphony musicians far more than they know, and I can only hope our music and our time with them has added something significant to their lives.

## **Biography:**

Nick Naegele plays violin with four regional orchestras: (from north to south) the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra (Kalamazoo, Michigan), the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra (Dayton, Ohio), the Huntington Symphony Orchestra (Huntington, West Virginia), and the Chattanooga Symphony & Opera (Chattanooga, Tennessee). While at the College-Conservatory of Music (part of the University of Cincinnati [Cincinnati, Ohio]), Nick not only finished a performance doctorate and a five-year teaching assistantship (under Piotr Milewski) but also acquired a decade's experience working as a street musician summers in Chicago, Illinois, keeping close to his folks and his first teacher Jeri-Lou Zike. A committed new music artist, he regularly seeks and accepts opportunities to present contemporary works--collaborating with individual artists and ensembles both established (Steve Reich, George Tsontakis, eighth blackbird) and emerging (Douglas Pew, Michael Ippolito, Jennifer Jolley) and playing in venues and for organizations of all types and sizes (Classical Revolution Cincinnati, NANOWorks, Contemporary Dance Theater, MusicX, Chamber Music Cincinnati, Cincinnati Ballet). When he isn't driving from place to place, freelancing in Chicago or

Cincinnati, trying to keep up with far-flung friends and family, or (of course) practicing, Nick enjoys exercising, writing and reading, watching speedruns of video games, listening to stories and music, playing piano, and composing. He also majored in math and earned an honors certificate in community engagement (both undergrad).