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The Brickyard Broadcast: A virtual concert, the first of its kind

Myra Bari, Correspondent

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The trumpet section of the Jazz Orchestra performs at the NC State Jazz Concert on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2020 at Stewart Theatre. The concert also featured performances from the Jazz Lab Band.

Marissa McHugh

Music, at its core, is a medium of communication. Countless composers and artists have strived to capture messages for their audiences to interpret, and perhaps the most impactful of these messages are delivered through concerts. The pandemic, however, has prevented the attendance of concerts and musical performances in person. Despite this, the Department of Music at NC State has been actively working to create the Brickyard Broadcast, an innovative and unique musical experience that is entirely virtual.

According to Nathan Leaf, associate teaching professor and director of choral activities at NC State, the inspiration for the Brickyard Broadcast initially came from a series of performances by composer Lisa Bielawa. Since April, Bielawa has been performing a series of concerts at home, composing new pieces, including submissions sent to her by musicians around the globe. Leaf and Peter Askim, associate teaching professor and director of orchestral studies at NC State, teamed up with Bielawa to create a piece of music that was fresh yet adaptive for musicians performing at home or in person.

According to Leaf, one of the primary goals of the event is “to explore new possibilities about what music-making can be given these circumstances.” He explained that putting together a series of performances individually means that syncing instruments as well as the choir is increasingly more difficult.

Perhaps the most startling difference between this event and past concerts held by the NC State Department of Music is the format. According to Askim, the event will be a virtual reality representation of the Brickyard, with up to nine different musical groups present. Participants will be able to walk in between performers’ avatars while the music is playing.

“The audience can choose what they want to hear,” Askim said. “If they want to hear group A, or the choir or the brass more, they can navigate closer to one group or the other. Each audience member will have their own unique concert experience depending on what they chose.”

A major hurdle associated with planning such an immersive and detailed event like the Brickyard Broadcast is the complexity of creating the unknown. According to Leaf, there are many aspects to creating something like the Brickyard Broadcast, such as the audio-engineering and the creation of the virtual space, in addition to the composition of the music and organization of the performances.

“No one person is in charge of the whole thing because it's such a diverse compilation of different skills and tasks that have to be done,” Leaf said.

According to Askim, the significance of performing this event at NC State is enormous as it emphasizes the drive of the students, the support of the community and the mission of the University.

“NC State is the perfect place to do something so experimental and cutting edge, especially when the students are involved in the whole process from the beginning to the end of this experience,” Askim said. “For the student musicians, I think it's great. To be part of putting on what nobody else in the world is doing for audience members, I think that's super exciting. For the University, I think it represents what we do: imagining something unique and then implementing it, making it happen, making it into reality.”

For Leaf, this project comes at a time where students need to feel connected to campus and each other. He feels like this event will allow for this feeling of connectedness, camaraderie and experience.

“It's an interesting thing to think about, for freshmen here,” Leaf said. “A freshman at NC State may have never walked through the Brickyard. This event is ultimately a chance to gather together virtually in the Brickyard, the center of campus, a special place for everyone.”

At its core, the Brickyard Broadcast is about self-expression in a time where loneliness has become so pervasive. Continuing to forge connections with others through the arts, especially music, can be a way for people to feel part of something.

The Brickyard Broadcast will premiere on Thursday, Nov. 12 at 6 p.m. To learn more about the event, visit the NC State Department of Music's [website](#).

Myra Bari