



MARCHING PERCUSSION

COMPOSITION, ARRANGING, A CAREER



Nick Riley, MA

Composer/Arranger
Director, ConneXus

WHO AM I?

- Centerville, Ohio native, Centerville HS Class of 2007
- **Education**
 - BM - Music Education, Capital University, 2011
 - MA - Music Education, The Ohio State University, 2023
 - PhD - Music Education, The Ohio State University (in progress)
- **Career**
 - First gig: Archbishop Alter HS, 2007
 - Early beginnings, high school and DCI teaching
 - Director of Bands, Liberty Center Local Schools 2012-2021
 - Current grad school work
 - Founder/Director, ConneXus
 - Writing clientele



WHAT DO I DO?

GRADUATE SCHOOL

- Current PhD student
- Teach music education courses
- Music education research

CONNEXUS

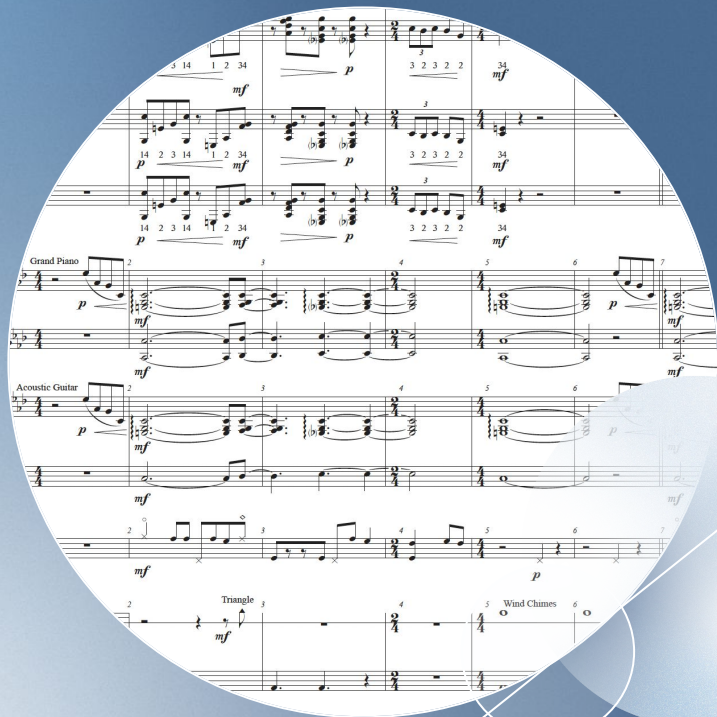
- Founder, Director, Program Coordinator, Ensemble Specialist

WRITING

- Winds, percussion, any combo
- International clientele of over 30 groups annually

EVERYTHING ELSE

- Teaching
- Judging
- Judge education
- Consultant work
- Circuit management



COMPOSITION & ARRANGING



MY PROCESS

"Everything is about the **students**. The role I play directly impacts their success and their perception of music performance. I strive to build **meaningful relationships** with clients to allow for the highest levels of **creativity and collaboration**.

TIMELINE

- **November - January:** Assemble contracts
- **January - April:** Design meetings
- **April - September:** Writing, invoicing, editing
- **September - November:** Consultation, edits, feedback
- **November - December:** Close books, upload new shows

CREATIVE PROCESS

- Design meetings
- Show mapping
- Planning time
- Listen to source material
- Sketch melody or important ideas
- Layer harmonies, background parts
- Fill in everything else
- Create engraved score, parts, MP3s, program notes

If this were my part for a season, would I want to play it?

CREATING A MOOD

"The Colosseum"

Front Ensemble: Nick Riley

Battery: Bryce Hopwood

Sound Design: Drew Brown

Questions I Ask ...

- What is the Colosseum?
- Why should we care?
- What are we saying?
- What is the mood/vibe?
- How can I convey this within the confines of the activity?

Musical Devices

- Pentatonic writing
- Modal writing
- Patience
- Perfect 4ths/5ths
- Instrumentation:
 - Marching machine
 - Impact drums
 - Brass patches

Audio: The Colosseum Part 1

The image displays a musical score for 'The Colosseum Part 1', spanning measures 1 to 14. The score is arranged in a multi-stem format with the following parts and markings:

- Brass:** Measures 9-14, marked *mf*.
- Tuba:** Measures 9-14, marked *mf*.
- Violin:** Measures 1-14, marked *p*.
- Cello:** Measures 1-14, marked *p*.
- Cello Section:** Measures 1-14, marked *p*.
- Mallet Station:** Measures 1-14, marked *mp*.
- Large Drum:** Measures 1-14, marked *mp*.
- Electric Guitar 1:** Measures 1-14, marked *p*.
- Electric Guitar 2:** Measures 1-14, marked *mf*, with a note 'w/ distortion' at measure 9.
- Electric Bass:** Measures 1-14, marked *p*, with a note 'Lightly rearticulate as needed' at measure 9.
- Drum Set:** Measures 1-14, marked *mp*.
- Marching Machine:** Measures 9-14, marked *mp*.
- Perussion 1:** Measures 1-14, marked *mp*.
- Perussion 2:** Measures 1-14, marked *mp*, with 'Finger Cymbals' at measure 6 and 'Sus Cym' at measure 9.
- Perussion 3:** Measures 1-14, marked *mp*, with 'BD' at measure 1.
- Perussion 4:** Measures 1-14, marked *mp*, with 'Sizzle Cym' at measure 1 and 'Heavy Chains on Metal Sheet' at measure 9.

WORKING WITH LYRICS

"Out Of The Ruins"
Front Ensemble & Battery: Nick Riley
Sound Design: Drew Brown

Questions I Ask ...

- What is the primary layer and when?
- How can I make sure the acoustic instruments contribute meaningfully?
- What emotions am I trying to convey by picking these particular lyrical segments?

Musical Devices

- Rhythmic modulation
- 4 key changes
- Highlights for instrumental subsections
- Limited battery scoring

Audio: Out Of The Ruins Part 2

The image displays a musical score for 'Out Of The Ruins Part 2', featuring a front ensemble and battery. The score is written for Vibraphone 1 and 2, Bells, Xylophone, Maracas 1, 2, and 3, Piano, Cymbals, and Vocals. The music is in 3/4 time and features a key change from B-flat major to D minor at measure 32. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte), and articulation like accents and slurs. A 'Cym Roll' section is indicated above measures 31 and 32. The vocal line is present from measure 33 onwards.

REINVENT A CLASSIC

"Autumn"

Winds & Percussion: Nick Riley

Sound Design: Nick Pourcho

Questions I Ask . . .

- How many different things can I do with this theme?
- Is it still recognizable? Because if not . . . what's the point?
- How does the original convey the theme?
- Can the theme be effectively translated to this medium?

Audio: [Autumn Full Show](#)

The image displays a page of a musical score for the piece "Autumn". The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute (Fl.), Bass Clarinet 1 (B. Cl. 1), Bass Clarinet 2 (B. Cl. 2), Alto Saxophone (A. Sx.), Tenor Saxophone (T. Sx.), Bass Saxophone (B. Sx.), Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), Trumpet 1 (B. Tpt. 1), Trumpet 2 (B. Tpt. 2), Horn (Hn.), Baritone (Bar.), and another Baritone (Bar.). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (e.g., *mf*, *p*, *f*, *ff*). The piece is in a key signature of one flat and features a complex rhythmic structure with multiple time signatures, including 3/4, 4/4, and 3/8. The score is numbered from 21 to 31.

Musical Devices

- Very different themes
- Establish an idea, then play
- Combine a theme and a disparate style together
- Everyone loves a key change . . .

BIG TIPS FOR A CAREER AS A DESIGNER

TAKE THE GIG

Your first gig won't pay you a million dollars or perhaps be the "best" program . . . but, it's your chance so do a REALLY good job!

COMMUNICATE

Answer emails within 24 hours. Be willing to take texts and phone calls. Respond to urgent needs. Know your deadlines and logistics.

ADVERTISE

Get yourself out there! Yes, you'll need to do your own promotion and despite what some folks in the activity think, you should brag about your accomplishments.

CONTRACTS

Develop and establish a contract. Don't price yourself out of the market. Insist on assurances.

ORGANIZATION

Keep a spreadsheet. Track your progress. Set goals. Keep a schedule. Stay on pace.

QUALITY + SERVICE = GROWTH

If you provide a great service and your output is of high quality, more clients will come to you.

MORE TIPS . . .

NETWORK

If you like working with someone, work with them often. Find like-minded visual designers and work on each other's projects.

SELF CARE

Composition can be isolating and lonely. Take some time for yourself each day and treat yourself as needed.

BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK

You might write something and a client hates it. Ask why. Come to a solution. Work hard to resolve. You're there for them.

SUPPORT

Your work doesn't end when the last movement is written. Cheer on your clients and offer assistance throughout the season.

BE HONEST

Self-explanatory.

MOVE ON

Not every client is a good fit for you or vice versa. You won't write for everyone for forever. Don't take it personally if they go with someone else - just move on. Another client is out there.

Q & A

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