

Q&A with a composer: Music major Gutiérrez inspired by poetry, space for recital

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It's spring, and that means the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Music Hall is up for its [annual shakedown of recitals and concerts](#), including Nicolás Gutiérrez's.

But the music composition major's senior recital is a bit different than most. He won't be a featured player; rather, Gutiérrez composed the music for his entire April 27 recital, entitled "Time and Space," featuring performances by the UW Oshkosh String Quartet, the Horizons Brass Quintet and students Martin Vajgrt, Joel Rathmann, Matthew Bragstad and the UW Oshkosh Chamber Choir under the direction of Dr. Eric Barnum.

"All music is composed by me," Gutiérrez, an Oshkosh West High School alumnus, proudly states on a notice he crafted to promote the incredible concert.

While at UW Oshkosh, Gutiérrez has studied composition with Profs. Ed Martin, David Dies and Eric Barnum and also studied the horn with Bruce Atwell. He has written commissioned works for the UW Oshkosh Chamber Choir and the Oshkosh West High School band program, as well as arranged works for the Horizons Brass Quintet, the Oshkosh Horn Choir and the Fox Valley Horn club all while holding the principal horn position in the UW Oshkosh Symphony Orchestra and the UW Oshkosh Wind Ensemble.

While also performing with other instrumental and vocal ensembles, Gutiérrez has been on the executive board for Students for Music, a student-led organization that puts on the Chamber Arts Concert Series at UW Oshkosh. He is also the president of Oshkosh Collegiate Composers.

UW Oshkosh Today caught up with Gutiérrez's and fired a few questions his way in advance of his Sunday, April 27 recital in the UW Oshkosh Music Hall. Here's the exchange...

Give us some sense for the amount of time you put into the collective works featured in your recital?

Well, this recital represents the accumulation of knowledge and skills that I have acquired in my five years here at UWO. I came into the University as a Music Education student, and after my sophomore year, I decided to switch it to music composition, as I found that that was my true passion. I have been in a brass quintet since my freshman year here, and I found myself drawn to arranging music for them. I had a moment, at the end of my sophomore year, where I was sitting at Starbucks, listening to a film score while reading, and realized that I wanted to be the person that wrote that music. Fast forward three years, and I now have an eclectic portfolio of repertoire to my name. I suppose as far as collective time, you could say this is three-years' worth of material. This recital will feature my first ever original

composition, a string quartet, all the way to a piece that I finished last month. Each piece required a various amount of time, as far as the actual composing process goes. It also requires rehearsal time from the performers who are playing the music. Needless to say, this is a quite a time consuming process.

Where do you draw your inspiration from? What composers do you look to as inspiration?

I draw my inspiration from many different outlets. I certainly have a passion for language, literature, and poetry. Four out of the six works featured on my recital have text to them. I always find that my music is simply an extension of what I feel in response to something, such as a poem. I also find inspiration in more abstract concepts such as existentialism, humanism, philosophy, etc. Cosmology is also something that I am extremely passionate about, as evident in the title of my recital. As far as composers, I find that I'm influenced by everything I hear. I specifically enjoy music from the Renaissance era, and that influences my music. Some composers would be Thomas Tallis, Giovanni Palestrina, William Byrd and Giovanni Gabrieli. My teacher and mentor, Dr. Eric Barnum, who is the head of choral activities here at UWO, is someone personal that I look up to. He is a brilliant composer, and his music is quite idiomatic for the choral medium. Another inspiration is my composition professor, Dr. Ed Martin. He has helped me to develop and hone the compositional discipline. He worked with me on the electronics piece on my recital, as that is one of his passions.

Your theme for the recital is "Time and Space." Is that a reference to the works within? Talk a bit about the recital's theme and why you chose it.

Yes, that is definitely the theme that weaves in between all the pieces. The opening piece deals with a hypothetical dark sun in space, a blazing blue star. Another work is actually entitled "Time and Space" and includes quotes by famous astrophysicists such as Dr. Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Dr. Carl Sagan. I also wanted to explore the notion of life and death, the sacred and the profane, and how all of these concepts are housed within time and space, this universal medium. From grandiose concepts such as galaxies, stars and the cosmos, all the way down to family and the quest to find one's identity. It is quite an ambitious recital concept for an undergraduate student. The final piece, entitled "The Cloths of Heaven," has a moment at the end that becomes an aural representation of these hypothetical cloths that the poem was speaking about. These cloths are the summation of not only the piece itself but also the recital. The poet speaks of his dreams, and how they have the potential to become this brilliant cloths, filled with light and gold and stars and galaxies. However, they are only his dreams. That's what the music on recital represents: my dreams. On a personal, and rather nerdy, level, I am a Doctor Who fan, and the idea of time and space is pervasive in that show as well. Naturally, there are many hidden references to everything that I write. For example, the poems that I set in my song cycle are by Walt Whitman. There's a tempo marking in the final movement called "Yawp." This is a reference to his famous line "I sound my barbaric yawp over the rooftops of the world." Another example is in the piece for Euphonium and Electronics, titled "Time and Space." There's a tempo marking called "Flux." This is a reference to the Flux capacitor from Back to the Future, the piece of equipment that is responsible for time travel in the film.

What kind of faculty collaboration was involved in getting you and your recital ready to go?

The music department faculty have been nothing but supportive throughout this entire process. The composition professors, Dr. Ed Martin and Dr. John Mayrose, have been helping me work with the

performers and plan the logistics of the recital. Dr. Martin has helped me work with the electronics, and he even had my piece premiered on the Wired Concert, which is usually reserved for faculty compositions. Dr. Eric Barnum has been diligently working with the choir to get my pieces ready for performance. He has been a great help as well. Dr. Dylan Chmura-Moore was gracious enough to teach me how to work a soundboard and the speakers for the electronics, as well as letting me use his equipment for the performance. However, none of the music that you hear would have been possible without Dr. Martin's guidance and assistance over the course of these three years.

What will you pursue after leaving UW Oshkosh?

I will be leaving in August for a Master's program in Music Composition at the CCPA of Roosevelt University in Chicago. After I complete that, there are many different options. I am quite interested in obtaining my doctorate, and I would like to eventually become a college professor of Music Composition and Theory, as well as continue to compose music.

Learn more:

- [UW Oshkosh Department of Music recitals, concerts: Calendar of Events](#)