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Fall 2017, A Summer of New UNH International Program, UNH Arts across the Globe

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College of Liberal Arts

THE COLLEGE LETTER



UNH Arts across the Globe

One summer, three countries, exponential memories.

This summer, two groups of UNH music and dance students traveled the globe to share their performances and experience new cultures — fostering a new appreciation for the arts internationally. From cosmopolitan Chengdu, China; to the hills of Perugia, Italy and the banks of Lake Geneva in Montreux, Switzerland; UNH students shared their artistic talents throughout the world.

In late May, a student vocal quartet, woodwind quartet, pianist and three dancers departed on an 18-hour flight for Chengdu, China just one day after UNH Commencement. During their 10-day trip, students performed for their counterparts at both Chengdu University and the Chengdu University of Information Technology.

On July 5, 18 members of the UNH 3 O’Clock Jazz Band, along with Nathan Jorgensen, UNH director of jazz studies, and an alumni guest artist departed for Europe to share their music at the Montreux Festival in Montreux, Switzerland; and at the Umbria Festival in Perugia, Italy, among others. The band gave six performances over 12 days after they were selected to play through competitive processes.

Exploring a New Culture in Chengdu

Spearheaded by Yige Wang, Confucius Institute co-director and Chengdu program director, and also led by Peggy Vagts, professor of music; and Gay Nardone, professor of dance; the Chengdu trip aimed to expose students to Chinese music and dance and to “repay” Chengdu University for traveling to UNH and performing for students over the past several years.



UNH 3 O’Clock Jazz Band in Perugia, Italy, before their performance at the Umbria Jazz Festival. Courtesy photo.



[VIEW SLIDESHOW](#): UNH students and faculty in China. Photos courtesy of Chengdu University.

“There’s an old Chinese saying — if someone gives you a peach, you ought to return it with a plum,” Wang said. “We’ve been receiving sweet peaches for years, and have never given any plums. We figured if we could pull together all of our resources: Confucius Institute resources, Music Department resources, and outside funding, we could make it work.”

The Confucius Institute at UNH forged a partnership between the University of New Hampshire and Chengdu University in China seven years ago. The Chengdu study abroad program provides intensive

language and cultural instruction to UNH students interested in experiencing life in China. A city of 14 million people, Chengdu is the capital of China's Sichuan province that dates back to the 4th century B.C. Although this trip was not part of the study abroad program, it gave students a taste of what life and the arts are like in a large, ancient — yet cosmopolitan — Asian city.

UNH students were warmly greeted by their Chengdu peers, performed for one another, and even received constructive critiques of one another’s performances.

“For many of our students, it was their first time out of the country,” Vagts said. “They observed a performance by Chengdu students. A Chinese faculty member taught us language directions and instructions, calligraphy and drawing. We went to the Main Square and museum and saw some really old and beautiful things. It was an opportunity to see, experience and learn.”

Repeat Performance

Chengdu University and UNH students reprise their performances right here in New Hampshire in celebration of the Moon Festival.

Friday, October 13 at 7 p.m.
Johnson Theatre, Paul Creative Arts Center

The event is free but tickets are required. Contact yige.wang@unh.edu for tickets.

Jordan Hastings, a senior music performance major and oboe player, said the trip gave him an international experience as a musician.

“Our woodwind quartet had never performed for an event of this caliber before and we knew that our repertoire would need to be expanded,” he said. “By the end of the semester, we were not only able to triple our set of music, but we had several major works ready to perform. It pushed us to play better and to appreciate all of the different ways music has impacted other cultures.”

Jenn Brisebois, a senior dance major, said she never dreamed she would travel to China, let alone perform there. Chinese dance is deeply rooted in tradition and is not ballet-based, but actually a series of traditional dances. Each dance tells a story, Brisebois explains, and you can clearly tell which dance style comes from which region.

Although said she enjoyed performing and watching performances, she most enjoyed talking to Chinese students off-stage.

“It was so interesting to hear what they thought about Americans and stereotypes and opinions that they have of us,” Brisebois said. “The whole experience made it very clear to me that the arts are more important now than ever because art is one of the only things that is able to bring all humans together on the same level.”

All That Jazz – Bringing an American Tradition to Europe

Nathan Jorgensen, assistant music professor and director of the 3 O’clock Jazz Band, explains that jazz music is unique because it is native to the United States and is the only music that was born in this country.

“It’s truly America’s art form and is the result of a collision of cultures,” he said. “We were able to share America’s indigenous art form with people of all cultures — that’s what the students got out of this trip.”

That might be why, when the UNH 3 O’Clock Jazz Band played at the Montreux and Umbria Music Festivals, members of the audience stayed up to two hours to listen, surprising many of the students, who learned 27 songs, or up to four times the amount of material they typically rehearse for a performance.



UNH 3 O’Clock Jazz Band performing at the Montreux Jazz Festival. Courtesy photo.

Both festivals have a tradition that extends many decades and both are among the most important jazz festivals in Europe, Jorgensen said. The Montreux Festival celebrated its 51st year, and Umbria was not far behind, celebrating its 44th annual event. Jorgensen submitted digital recordings of the band and learned in September 2016 that students were invited to play at both festivals, giving them plenty of practice time to prepare for two large events.

“I was extremely proud of the students throughout the tour; they represented themselves, the jazz program, their university, and their country with dignity and respect,” he said. “The students gained perspective on our country’s traditions and had the opportunity to experience two European cultures firsthand. They also created even stronger bonds and friendships with one another and created memories that will last a lifetime.”

One pair of jazz band alumni experienced a similar fondness for the Montreux Jazz Festival, which they attended in 1976, prompting them to help underwrite the experience for students this summer. Thanks to alumni Dave King ’78 and Ned Adamson ’79, students were able to afford to perform and experience Montreux and Perugia.

“The Band’s trip to Switzerland in 1976 provided one of the most memorable experiences of my life,” said Adamson. “It was my first time traveling to Europe, and Switzerland was at the top of my bucket list. Many of the friendships solidified by the travel experience have remained vital 41 years later. The hard work, practice, and striving for excellence personified by our director, Professor Dave Seiler, and my bandmates ... taught lessons that have served me well through the years. I was delighted to assist current students and trust they will have gained similar meaningful and enduring enrichment.”

“I had the chance to get to know both of these gentlemen better and listen to them recount stories from their trip experience 41 years ago,” Jorgensen said of King and Adamson. “For me that just showed the importance of giving

our students opportunities like this — these memories truly last a lifetime.”

[Krysten Godfrey Maddocks '96](#)

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