

Episode 14: I Went To Band Camp

Intro

Hello and welcome to Tonal Diversions. I'm your host, Lori Archer Sutherland, and this is my journey as a multifaceted musician. I'm a composer, clarinetist and more who is navigating the world of is classical music, and I'd love to share my adventures with you.

Episode proper

Hello and welcome to the show. I'm trying a new recording location in the house. I have no idea if this is going to be even better or worse, so please bear with me. In August, I went to band camp. You may be thinking, really? As an adult, you went to band camp? Seriously? But why not? Personally, I think as a society we've gotten to be way too serious in what we consider "proper activities" for adults. Why shouldn't adults go away for a week of intense yet fun learning about a subject? It doesn't have to be music. Go play sports, learn a language, learn how to cook anything. Sometimes that's the only time you get a chance to do it. I didn't get to go to summer band camp as a kid for various reasons. To me, this was a better-late-than-never opportunity. I'm happy that more and more adult camps are opening up. I know of a few people who have gone to different camps around the country.

Birch Creek Wind Ensemble Retreat

My husband and I went to Birch Creek. Wind Ensemble Retreat. It's located in Door County, Wisconsin. If you haven't been up to that part of Wisconsin, it's a really nice vacation area that my husband and I have enjoyed going to over the years.

The camp is located in the town of Egg Harbor. It's a reasonable drive from our house— far enough to feel like you're getting away, but not so far that you have to think about flying. The camp began in 1978, and it was founded by James and Frances Dutton. They even purchased the farm across the road from them, which became the campus for the program. Various buildings were renovated to become dorms and the dining hall, and the barn turned into the concert hall. That's the first time I've ever performed in a barn! It has surprisingly good acoustics, too. More improvements have been made over the decades, making it a rather nice venue for a retreat.

We took advantage of the faculty housing, which, from what I understand, was a former small motel that was moved to the Birch Creek campus. It worked for our needs, though admittedly the bed was not all that comfortable. But it was so convenient to be on the farm and to be able to run back to the room as necessary.

Monday

Because of the drive, we arranged to arrive a day early. I'm glad we did, as it allowed us to get settled and meet up with our friend, who also arrived the day before. It was a beautiful summer day, so we went to the harbor and sat on the beach for a while and just relaxed. My friend and I even dipped our toes into the water, but it wasn't quite warm enough for us to decide to swim. Then we drove around the area for a bit before settling on where to eat for dinner.

Tuesday

The first official morning of the camp consisted of registration, Covid testing, and auditions. Thankfully for me, the auditions were informal because honestly, I don't know that I can remember the last time I've actually had to truly audition for something. I've been very lucky to be invited to play or I've been in groups that just don't require an audition. Now this at least was for the woodwinds. We were pretty informal and it was more to chat with and get to know the woodwind director, Steve.

I'll admit my memory is a little hazy at this point and I can't fully remember if we had then a full rehearsal and then lunch or lunch and then a rehearsal. Honestly, the details don't really matter at this point. But at some point we had lunch and we also had our first full rehearsal. Because I have not been practicing or playing quite as much as I should be. I tried my best to not overdo it in the first session because I wanted my chops to last for the rest of the camp.

Dinner was on our own that night, and we met up with a few more people and headed out to a really good pizza place.

Wednesday

The second morning, which was Wednesday, started with breakfast in the dining hall. I have to say the food was pretty darn good and I didn't go hungry. I enjoyed what they fed us and we had a nice seating area outside. We were so lucky to have some really, really nice weather while we were up there.

After breakfast, we went to our warmup sessions and for that we split out into woodwinds, brass and percussion. We spent about a half an hour doing various warmups and then we went to go meet up with the full band. For the pieces that we played, they split the conducting up between the woodwind, brass and percussion directors, so each of them got two or three songs that they worked with us on.

Lunch was again at the dining hall and again it was tasty and it was just nice to sit and chat with some of the other musicians. After lunch was sectionals, so similar to our warmup, we broke out into woodwinds, brass and percussion. The woodwind section had their own woodwind choir piece. It was an arrangement of a Mozart tune that we were going to play for the concert, so we worked a lot on that. After that we had a break and then it was back to full band.

Dinner, again, was on our own and I believe that that was the night that we actually just went to the grocery store and picked up some various prepared sandwiches and stuff like that. Took them back to the faculty housing in the common area that they had and just chilled out in there and ate our dinner.

In the evenings, if you wanted to meet up with other people to do other small group music, that was an option. Even though I brought a bunch of duets and quartets with me, honestly, by the time we got to after dinner, I was tired and I was done playing for the day and I couldn't imagine picking up my instrument again. But other groups met up, like the sax quartet and they had a lot of fun doing it and so good for them.

Thursday

Thursday was pretty similar to Wednesday in terms of our schedule. We had warmups again, then full band, lunch, sectionals and full band. For dinner, we really enjoyed the English Inn. They have a beautiful outdoor seating area where the tables actually have fire pits in them. So that was an intriguing way to eat. The food was delicious and it was just a nice setting to have a relaxing, fancier dinner that night.

Friday

Then Friday was concert day because the concert was going to be at 2:00, the schedule was a little bit different. We still had our warmups, and we still had some full band time, but it wasn't a very intense rehearsal. We had a leisurely lunch at the dining hall and then we got ready for the concert and for our group picture.

I have to say the concert went rather well. And it seemed very well attended, from what I could tell looking out into the audience. It's not a huge venue, but I felt like the seats filled up. And as any musician knows, it's always gratifying to have a good concert after putting in so much work for it, because we did work hard. We played easily five or six hours each day and these were focused rehearsals. This wasn't an "oh yeah, let's play through this piece again." No, the conductors really strove to bring out the best in how we played. They really focused on getting us to sound like a good, cohesive ensemble.

We elected to stay yet one more night so that we didn't have to bother with driving back after a full day. It gave us a chance for a very relaxing dinner with our friend who also stayed the extra night.

Back home

On Saturday we packed up and left somewhat early, as there wasn't much of a reason to stay longer. We had an uneventful drive home and it was good to get back to our own house and of course, to see the kitties.

So what's the verdict? Well, I enjoyed myself. I had a lot of fun. I learned some things that I could take back to my students and to my clarinet choir. And also for myself. I've been incorporating some of the tidbits in my own practice sessions already. I enjoyed playing with a new group of people because, as much as I love my local ensembles, sometimes it's nice to get a different experience. And I have to say it was nice to just get away for several days.

I don't know yet if it's something I'll go to every year, as there's a lot of things on my list that I want to do, such as going back to ClarinetFest. I would certainly go again, though, and I would recommend it to others. I recommend checking out camps in your area. They're springing up all over the place. I know that there's a couple in Michigan, there are some in the Northeast, and I'm sure there are more that I'm just not even aware of.

Like I said at the beginning of the episode, it doesn't even have to be for band. Or music. Just find something you're interested in.

Thanks for listening to this rather quick recap of my several days at band camp. I hope you enjoyed listening to it and that it gives you something to consider as another option of how to fulfill your musical passions. Until next time!

Outro

Thank you for listening to Tonal Diversions! Subscribe wherever podcasts are found and share with a friend until next time. Bye!