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Featured Researcher | Dan Allcott

TTU music professor delves into composer's archives to rediscover lost works

(http://www.tntech.edu/files/research/Featured_Researchers/DanAllcott-Gloves.jpg) Dan Allcott, cello professor and conductor of the Bryan Symphony Orchestra, is sorting through eight unarchived boxes of papers and compositions by Charles Faulkner Bryan. Some of the compositions in the boxes were thought to have been lost. Allcott is going through the different versions of the pieces, sorting and cataloguing and editing them so they can be performed. Bryan was one of Tennessee Tech University's first music professors and an award-winning composer. The Bryan Fine Arts Building is named after him.



"Bryan was one of the first people to put down a really firm footprint at what was then a polytechnic institute for the study of music and he did big stuff, big performances. For me, it's very inspiring too because basically here was a guy who was being raised during the Depression era in McMinnville. His parents thought it totally legitimate to spend extra money to send him to Nashville to study music and he left the South to better himself. He went to Yale University to study with a very famous classical composer and just kept pursuing two things. One, he wanted to pursue excellence but he also wanted to reflect where he grew up and that's a really neat thing."

Graduate assistants:

J.R. Lakey, Central Washington University

Research procedure, findings:

When Allcott began looking through the boxes, which were found in an attic storage room in the Bryan Fine Arts building, he realized they contained different scores and versions of several of Bryan's compositions. His first priority was to get a definitive version of Bryan's "The Bell Witch Cantata" ready for the Oak Ridge Symphony Orchestra and Chorus to perform at a concert this spring.

"When I got down here, I realized there were three other scores, versions, plus all this stuff, original notes that we hadn't taken into account," Allcott said. "So my first job was to figure out in which order they came."

"So I lined them up on this table and went page by page and made notes and labeled them which one was which and then figured out in what order they came. This one includes all the corrections, edits, reductions, anything that's been redacted, anything that's been taken out, this is the one that seems the most complete."

Research application:

"In a scholarly way, I would like to have the definitive edition to put forth. But the other thing is, I want to have the most performable edition," Allcott said. "I'm a music performance guy. My job is to put something together that would be easy for someone else to pick up and perform because that's what I want. I want Charles Bryan's music to be performed."

(http://www.tntech.edu/files/research/Featured_Researchers/DanAllcott-Above.jpg) **What motivates you to do this research?**

"This guy worked so hard and for me that was a big inspiration. I want to make his music available for more people to perform," Allcott said.

"I think it's great for students to learn about people like Charles Faulkner Bryan, who was from McMinnville, who had the audacity to compose an opera on Southern themes, to compose a lot of choral music, to compose and write educational materials, to compose symphonies."

"If anything, one of the things I try to impress on students is, 'This is your real time. You're not just pretending to be a musician, if you want to write an opera, you write an opera.'"

"It's a great thing for our students to see that you can be from anywhere. You can be from Crossville, you can be from McMinnville, you can be from Cookeville. You don't have to be from Somewhere Else to do significant and good work and to pursue it getting performed."

What are your future plans for this research?

"I've created a project for myself. If I'm going to be the world's reigning expert on the performable editions of Charles Bryan, great. Who else is going to do that? I think this is a really neat thing for me to be able to do and also to bring it to our students. They walk in the building and say, 'Who is Charles Bryan?' and people will always say, 'Go see Mr. Allcott, he'll tell you who Charles Byran is.'"

Is this research integrated into classroom instruction?

"Individual students can be given a portion of a manuscript and because they are taking instrumentation class or computer techniques in music, they can be transferring some of the music into a more ready state and helping with this."

"I think while I'm here, once generationally, students and the orchestra at Tech will perform at least one work of Charles Faulkner Bryan's. I think it's an important thing to do."

What have been the biggest challenges in this project?

"I think the biggest challenge for me is that I'm not a full-time archivist or musicologist. Although I've been given release time this semester to get as much work done on this as possible, I could be doing this for five or six years to get all this ready."

If you had unlimited time and resources, what form would this project take?

"As yet, it's not organized for either research or performance and that's really the goal," he said.

"If I had unlimited time, I would take even more time on each piece of music. I'm afraid I'll have missed something because as much as I've tried to go through page by page, I also am under a deadline. If I had unlimited resources, I probably would have people helping me scan music."

"When I'm doing this full time, I'm better at it. But I don't do this full time. What I do is I teach and conduct and practice my cello and teach cello, so this has been a nice opportunity to do something a little bit different, but it's made me hungry to do it more and that's the scary part."

"I literally have opened Pandora's box for myself with this because I can't imagine, there's no way I cannot be coming back to this."



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