What do Yo-Yo Ma, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Midori, Bruce Hornsby, Wynton Marsalis, Doc Severinsen, Canadian Brass, and Edgar Meyer have in common (other than music, of course)? They all have appeared as guest artists at Eastern Music Festival & School.

What is Eastern Music Festival & School?

This five-week summer experience in Greensboro, NC, focuses on classical music with two main components — training and performance.

A professional orchestra composed of the school’s faculty, directed by Gerard Schwarz, performs weekly classical concerts headlined by world-renowned guest artists. Faculty members also perform chamber concerts in two venues — a 1909 Carnegie library and an intimate professional recital hall. Two student orchestras perform each week, in addition to piano and chamber recitals throughout the season. Various artists present a weekly, mixed series of classical programs — from opera to organ galas to themed concerts. EMF also offers alternative music genres, children’s camps, and community participation programs.

50 years of beautiful music
Eastern Music Festival & School

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How Did Eastern Music Festival Begin?

Sheldon Morgenstern (Shelly), a young horn player from Greensboro, had long envisioned a music camp offering instruction oriented toward the student. Shelly pitched his idea to Guilford College’s president and arranged to start the music camp at the college. After recruiting 72 students, hiring 14 faculty members, and raising $22,000, Maestro Morgenstern presided over the first season of the “Guilford Musical Arts Center” (later named EMF) in 1962.

As the camp grew, Shelly’s dream of a noncompetitive learning environment, a resident professional orchestra with accomplished performers who also teach the students, and a unique artist-in-residence program became a reality. He remained music director and principal conductor for 36 years until his retirement in 1997.

What is EMF Like Today?

Today, EMF offers more than 100 music events each summer to an audience of more than 60,000. Since 2006, Gerard Schwarz has put his own personal stamp on the Festival as its music director.

Special features for the 50th anniversary include a kick off concert, “Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra,” with Wynton Marsalis, Alumni Weekend, and nine special commissions.
Gerard Schwarz
Music Director

This is a season of commemorations and changes for Gerard Schwarz, the award-winning symphony conductor whose podium career spans three continents and more than four decades. "There’s always something exciting going on," says the energetic American maestro and music director of both the Eastern Music Festival and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

"Right now I’m looking forward to the 50th anniversary season of the Festival, which is very special. Its founder was Shelly Morgenstern. I knew him slightly, and I think his concept of the educational component is absolutely the best way to have a festival. We have a faculty Festival Orchestra with about 80 players from all over the country, every one of them a teacher. Then there are about 200 students who get a very specialized and focused learning experience, because each teacher has only two or three students. And the young players’ two student orchestras have a new program every week with great, big pieces like The Rite of Spring and the Shostakovich Fifth Symphony. It’s a fabulous experience for them! They whoop and holler at the performances of the faculty’s Festival Orchestra, too, and the faculty is equally excited to hear the young artists play. It’s such a great, nurturing situation."

Schwarz has always been excited about music education, ever since he demanded a trumpet of his own at age 8, and began practicing six to eight hours a day. He became the youngest co-principal trumpet in New York Philharmonic history, and his solo recordings are still considered among the world’s best. The music community was shocked when Schwarz resigned from the Philharmonic while still in his 20s and subsequently sold off his collection of trumpets. This kind of bridge-burning is seldom seen at such a high level of achievement.

But the budding maestro had other plans in mind for his future. He focused in like a laser on learning orchestral and chamber music scores, new works, and repertoire classics, everything that might enhance a career on the podium. And at the same time, he has looked for an educational component to every musical endeavor.

In Seattle, where Schwarz has spent the greater part of his career (he leaves the Seattle Symphony Orchestra music directorship this summer, after 26 seasons in that post), he has been a constant promoter of musical opportunities for the young: children attending Symphony concerts in the schools and in community halls, or playing (as All-State winners) alongside the professionals in the concert hall; or going to special music programs designed for kids as young as infants and preschoolers. Fledgling composers, too, get their works played by Seattle Symphony ensembles, so they can hear how their music really can sound.

Schwarz, who has also held music directorships from Tokyo to Liverpool, says he particularly loves the "casual vibe" of the Eastern Music Festival & School, as well as the excellent acoustics of all the halls where the concerts take place, and the quality of both students and faculty.

"Some festivals are very competitive, very cutthroat. We don’t do that at the EMF," explains this father of four. "The students are very serious, around 12 or 18 years old on average, and everybody is really motivated to practice. But they are also having a wonderful, fun experience.

So what’s next for this busy maestro? Stepping down in Seattle will give him a little more breathing-space, and perhaps the chance to do some more composing of his own music. Schwarz also chairs a group called Young Musicians Excelling, which helps fund high-school kids who need help paying for the costs of All-State or All-Northwest ensemble participation. The maestro’s next big thing: a TV project of eight annual hour-long shows, featuring an orchestra of "All-Stars" from major symphonies across the country. The future shows can be watched on TV, heard on a CD or on radio, or downloaded from the Internet. Thus far he’s getting a “lot of green lights” for this project. When you meet Jerry Schwarz and hear his enthusiasm, it’s clear he has a way of turning “Maybe” or “We’ll see” into “You bet!"

"I have long appreciated EMF’s practice of placing high-school students with professionals as a great learning experience.

"There’s always something exciting going on," says the energetic American maestro and music director of the Eastern Music Festival. "I was at EMF for the summers of 1993 and 1994, and it was my first real experience playing repertoire on the percussion side of things."

Ellis L. Marsalis Jr.
Drummer/vibraphonist/composer

"Our country used homegrown arts to make us into one people, to teach us who we are."

America’s First Family of Jazz

Of all the successful EMF students, the Marsalis family is arguably the most well-known. Five members of the Marsalis family (Ellis, Branford, Wynton, Delfeayo, and Jason) were recipients of the 2011 National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Award, the nation’s highest honor in jazz (nea.gov).

Ellis L. Marsalis Jr. (father)
Jazz pianist and instructor/professor emeritus, University of New Orleans

Branford Marsalis
Saxophonist/Branford Marsalis Quartet

Wynton Marsalis
Trumpeter/artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center/conductor/composer/educator

Delfeayo Marsalis
Trombonist/composer/producer

Jason Marsalis
Drummer/vibraphonist/composer

"I have long appreciated EMF’s practice of placing high-school students with professionals as a great learning experience."
The Perfromances

The Eastern Festival Orchestra is the resident professional orchestra and performs in the Lincoln Financial Festival Orchestra Series. Maestro Schwarz leads the orchestra through five Saturday evenings headlined by world-renowned guest artists, performing in the Festival’s home, Dana Auditorium. The orchestra is made up of EMF’s exceptionally talented faculty who come together each summer to teach and perform.

The faculty also perform in two chamber series, including the Monday UNCG Chamber Series at the School of Music at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. The Tuesday Carnegie Chamber Series is held in the 102-year-old Carnegie Room of Hege Library at Guilford College.

The Friends & Great Performers Series includes an eclectic mix of music on Wednesdays, such as a composer-themed concert and an organ gala featuring an Orgues Létourneau Limitee organ at a 187-year-old Gothic church. Always a sellout, the Greensboro Opera and EMF collaborate on two dinner theatre-style evenings of popular music at Greensboro’s Temple Emanuel. Audiences also look forward to the Steinway Piano Gala starring EMF’s acclaimed piano faculty and Pianopalooza, a showcase of EMF’s young pianists performing serious repertoire in sometimes tongue-in-cheek attire.

In the Thursday and Friday Young Artists Orchestra Series, students gain a full professional experience, learning new repertoire weekly and filling principal chairs based on faculty assignments rather than competition. Sometimes mistaken for professionals, students play challenging repertoire led by resident conductor José-Luis Novo.

Beginning in 2003, EMF/fringe began to rock with its non-traditional music choices. Set in downtown Greensboro, this series features artists like The Preservation Hall Jazz Band, The Waybacks, Trombone Shorty, Mark O’Connor, and Doc Severinsen & El Ritmo de la Vida that represent Americana, roots, blues, rock, Latin, and funk.

Other music events include EMFJazz&blues, young artists chamber and piano music events, an EMFkids concert, concert preludes, pops concerts throughout the Triad, and community outreach events performed by the young artists.

The School

The School at Eastern Music Festival is an intense, rigorous training program designed for pre-professional musicians ages 14 to 22. From a worldwide pool of more than 800 applicants, the School accepts only 200 young artists and boasts a 2:1 student-to-faculty ratio.

The students live on the campus of Guilford College where they receive private lessons and participate in master classes led by faculty and guest artists as part of the artist-in-residence program. Each of the two student orchestras rehearses six times a week. In addition, there are sectional rehearsals and chamber music assignments.

Students in the nationally recognized piano program perform during the weekly piano recitals as well as with chamber ensembles. And all of that hard work pays off. Students perform more challenging repertoire than what they play at home and rapidly progress in five weeks. These gifted young artists appear before the community and develop the poise and confidence of professional musicians.

A Chance to Shine

Each year, the School holds a Concerto Competition with auditions open to all EMF students. Winners perform a solo work with one of the Young Artists Orchestras. In addition, young pianists are eligible for the EMF Piano Competition, which offers three cash prizes and the opportunity to perform at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

Just the Beginning

Former EMF students go on to enjoy successful solo careers, teach at some of the country’s finest conservatories, establish famous ensembles, and serve as principal chairs in prominent orchestras. (Notable students include: the youngest concertmaster in the history of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the first female trumpet for the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, conductor and artistic director of Paris’ Orchestre de la Cité, and founder of the Elements Quartet.)

“I learned how to make a life out of music, not just how to play better, but what to do to get a job and keep it.”

–EMF student
Founded in 1837, Guilford College has been home to Eastern Music Festival & School for all but one of its 50 years. The tranquil liberal arts college in Greensboro is distinguished by its academic excellence, sustainability initiatives, and Quaker heritage that provide students and the Festival with an ideal setting.

The linking of Guilford College, Eastern Music Festival & School, and the city of Greensboro has proved to be mutually beneficial. During the summer, EMF generates more than $1 million in revenue for the city in the form of hotel reservations, restaurants, retail, and entertainment. EMF guest artists stay in four Diamond properties — the Proximity and the O. Henry — the official hotels of the EMF.

Programs for the Community

Children’s Camps

The Festival operates two summer camps for children ages 4 to 11 in conjunction with the Music Academy of North Carolina: EMF’s Children’s Camps provide kid-friendly activities, rehearsal visits, singing, and an introduction to melody, harmony, and rhythm (ages 4-6 and 48-6-8). The Festival for 10 years or more, a third have returned 20 years or more, and three have taught at EMF for more than 30 years!

CONCERTMASTER: Jeffrey Multer* (26 years), The Juilliard School (faculty), The Florida Orchestra (concertmaster), The Elements Quartet
Principal Chairs:
Viola II – Randall Weiss (22 years)
Viola – Daniel Reinker (25 years)
Cello – Neal Cary (28 years)
Double Bass – Leonid Finkelshteyn (13 years)
Flute – Les Rotteges (17 years)
Oboe – Randall Ellis (6 years)
Clarinet – Shannon Scott (21 years)
Bassoon – Jeffrey Lyman (1st year)
Horn – Kevin Reid (12 years)
Trumpet – Mark Niehaus (12 years)
Trombone – Gregory Cox (34 years)
Tuba – Lee Hopp (12 years)
Timpani – John Feddersen (36 years)
Perception – Eric Schweikert (19 years)
Harp – Anna Kate Mackle* (12 years)
PIANO DEPARTMENT CHAIR: James Giles* (17 years), Northwestern University (faculty), concert soloist, Fulbright Scholar
RESIDENT CONDUCTOR (Young Artists): José-Luis Novo (15 years), Annapolis Symphony Orchestra and Binghamton Philharmonic (music director and conductor)