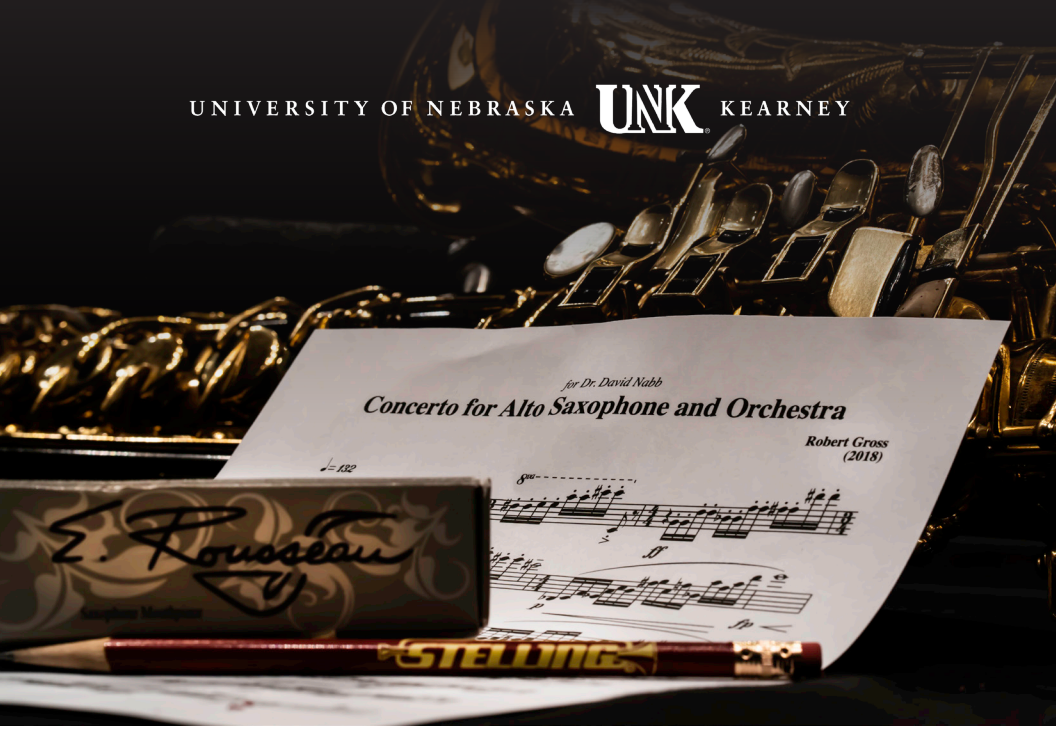


THE UNK ONE-HANDED WOODWINDS PROGRAM

HTTP://ONEHANDWINDS.UNK.EDU

KEARNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PRESENTS

WORLD PREMIERE

CONCERTO FOR SAXOPHONE & ORCHESTRA

Robert Gross, Composer

David Nabb, Saxophone | Alison Gaines, Conductor

OCTOBER 15, 2019 | 7:30 PM

University of Nebraska at Kearney: Fine Arts Recital Hall

Introduction to tonight's premiere, October 15, 2019.
By David Nabb

It is an honor for me to be part of the presentation of the World Premiere of the Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra by Robert Gross tonight. My saxophone is a Yamaha 875 Alto Saxophone that has been rebuilt and adapted to be played with only one hand. I wish to explain why this adaptation is necessary. In 2000, I experienced a catastrophic stroke that completely paralyzed my left arm, left leg, the left side of my torso and face. Since then, I have worked to rebuild my health, and collaborated with Kearney native Jeff Stelling to develop the adaptive saxophone I play for you tonight. My disability requires that my saxophone is designed to be played with only one hand. Back in 2000, Jeff Stelling set out to create a one-handed saxophone capable of doing everything a conventional two-handed saxophone can do. This had never been done before. Jeff Stelling designed, engineered and built this horn here in Kearney. This saxophone has enabled me to return to work as UNK Professor of Music.

On this saxophone, I control all of the note changes with my right hand. My left hand holds a handle that I use to help stabilize the instrument as I play. The handle serves no function other than helping me steady the instrument. Anyone interested in learning more about this instrument and how it works should visit my website at <onehandwinds.unk.edu>

This "Toggle-key saxophone" has received worldwide accolades. It has repeatedly been recognized as an important contribution in the development of musical instruments for persons with disabilities. In 2011, Jeff Stelling and I received awards from VSA, NAMM and NAPBIRT at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. In 2013, Jeff and I received the first-ever OHMI/Ars Electronica Prize for our work on the toggle-key saxophone at Bruckner Hall in Linz, Austria. Also in 2013, the toggle-key saxophone became the first adapted instrument ever recognized for study by the Board of the Royal College of Music in London. More recently, I was featured in the cast and the musical soundtrack for BBC's 2016 Paralympics television commercial "We're the Superhumans." This video had more than 50 million views online, and won dozens of international awards, including Grand Prix at the 2017 Cannes Lions Festival.

In recent years, my work has shifted away from developing a saxophone for my own use, and towards making toggle-key saxophones and other adapted musical instruments available to other persons with disabilities. To that end, I seek to demonstrate the value that all persons with disabilities bring to our communities. Part of that mission is to share the powerful potential of musical instruments designed for musicians with disabilities.

Without a doubt, Robert Gross' Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra is the first concerto ever written for a saxophonist who plays an adapted instrument. I am grateful to Robert Gross for having faith in this instrument and composing such a wonderful piece. The fact that an adapted musical instrument inspired the creation of this exciting work is noteworthy. I also wish to thank Alison Gaines and each individual member of the Kearney Symphony Orchestra for the work they have put into this performance. The creation of this piece, and of tonight's performance, attest to the progress we are making toward our goal of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in music making.

Comments on *Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra*
By Robert Gross

I first met Dr. David Nabb at the OHMI (One-Handed Musical Instruments) Trust Conference in Birmingham, England in September, 2018. I had unfortunately missed the first day of the conference, so I was not able to hear Dr. Nabb perform live, but I did attend the second day of the conference, and read Dr. Nabb's impressive biography. Intrigued, I listened to his TED talk on Youtube as well as several other performances on Youtube, and I was awestruck: Dr. Nabb quite literally had the best tone of any saxophonist I had ever heard. That he was playing on a one-handed adaptive instrument was beside the point; his playing was as fluid as any master saxophonist I had ever heard and his tone was incredibly beautiful. I made it my mission to introduce myself to Dr. Nabb and ask if I could compose a piece for him. I did exactly that: introduced myself, and not only found that Dr. Nabb was amenable for a new composition, I found myself with a dinner invitation with his wife and him.

As I got to know Dr. Nabb that evening, I realized that no solo unaccompanied piece for saxophone would do. I intended to write a solo unaccompanied piece as well, but really, my ambition grew to compose a full-fledged concerto for the man. However, I kept this ambition to myself because I wanted to compose at least a short section of the piece to prove that I could do the job, and then present the idea to Dr. Nabb.

I sketched the opening measures of the concerto in the airport waiting for my plane to go home. These opening measures became the genesis of the musical argument that pervades the concerto itself. The opening presents a twelve-tone ascending gesture, but the twelve tones are organized so that triads are emphasized. This seeming contradiction struck me: this piece was going to be about the clash of atonality (as manifested by the use of all twelve tones in the opening gesture) and tonality (as evidenced by the organization of the twelve tones into triads). I managed to sketch the first three minutes of the piece on the airplane home, and as quickly as I could, once home, made a MIDI (i.e., synthesizer) simulation of what the piece might sound like. I contacted Dr. Nabb via e-mail, proposed my idea, and was both thrilled and relieved when he accepted the idea.

The first section of the piece is devoted to tonality and tonal centers. Clearly E-flat predominates, and the opening thematic material is cast in the light of E-flat; each note serves in some function relative to the tonic of E-flat. In the first section, we also hear brief tonicizations of F and D, the two diatonic notes on either side of E-flat. The second section is atonal, and treats the opening material as a quasi tone-row (though proper twelve-tone techniques are not entirely deployed; the atonality is "free").

This left me with a conundrum for the third and final section. I believe in both kinds of music; I am interested both in tonal and atonal (or, as we call it now, post-tonal) music in equal measure. It occurred to me that if I concluded with either aesthetic landscape it would imply victory and supremacy for that aesthetic. For example, I wanted to avoid a narrative that said "thank goodness, tonality is restored, all is well again"; and I also wanted to avoid a narrative that said "thank goodness, tonality has evolved, all praise atonality." Either narrative was unsatisfactory.

I mulled it over, and decided that I needed a third way. I created an invented mode that would entail even further aesthetic implications. The set is C-Db-Eb-E-F#-G-A-B. It resembles octatonicism (seven out of eight tones: C-Db-Eb-E-F#-G-A); it resembles whole-tone (five out of six tones: G-A-B-Db-Eb); it resembles pentatonic (E-F#-A-B-C#); and it resembles ascending melodic minor (E-F#-G-A-B-C#-D#-E). However, it is neither completely tonal nor completely atonal because different rotations of the set can emphasize different pitches or none at all.

So the third section is based on this mode. Indeed, the cadenza treats the mode like an 8-tone tone row with transpositions, inversions and retrogrades, while the pre-cadenza and post-cadenza material emphasizes the more tonal aspects of the mode. The final argument of the piece is the presentation of the mode itself in ascending order (resembling the opening ascending gesture of the work), as a way of saying "you have been listening to…" as if it were a musical disc jockey.

I have every confidence that Dr. Nabb and Dr. Gaines will present an astounding premiere of this new work. I am extremely grateful to both of them for their diligence and attention to detail in helping to bring this project to life.

Robert Gross

Dr. Robert Gross received his DMA in music composition at University of Southern California where he also received a graduate certificate in Scoring for Motion Pictures and Television, and was the first person to complete two graduate-level programs in music at USC simultaneously. He also received an MA in Music for Film, Television and Theatre from the University of Bristol in England; an MM in Music Composition from Rice University; and a BM in Music Composition from Oberlin Conservatory. He has taught graduate and undergraduate level music theory at Rice University, and is currently a graduate student in music therapy at Texas Woman's University. He was half of Blind Labyrinth with the late Kenneth Downey, an experimental electroacoustic music duo, whose CD *Blasted Light* was released on the Beauport Classical label in 2014. He has presented papers at the national Society for Music Theory conference, the Texas Society for Music Theory Conference, the West Coast Conference of Music Theory and Analysis, and both national and regional chapters of Society of Composers, Inc, and at the international One-Handed Musical Instrument Trust Conference and Awards. His post-tonal analyses have been published in *Perspectives of New Music* and *Journal of Schenkerian Studies*, and his music therapy analyses published in *Qualitative Inquiries in Music Therapy*. Awards and honors include winner of University of Georgia Arch Composition Award for *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments*; special recognition award, First Music Competition, New York Youth Symphony; winner of tri-annual Inter-American Music Awards Composition Competition, with publication of winning piece by C. F. Peters; twice Margaret Jory Grant from American Music Center; ASCAP Grants to Young Composers Honorable Mention; orchestra work *Halcyon Nights* chosen for Whitaker New Music Readings by American Composers Orchestra; twice ASCAP Victor Herbert Award winner; twice ASCAP Grants to Young Composers Finalist.

David Nabb

David Nabb is Professor of Music at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Born and raised in Iowa, he holds both B.M. and M.M. degrees in Multiple Woodwind Performance from Indiana University, and Ph.D. in Music Education from the University of North Texas.

Since surviving a catastrophic stroke 2000, David has worked with Jeff Stelling to develop a professional saxophone that can be played with the right hand only. In 2013, David Nabb and Jeff Stelling received the first-ever OHMI/Ars Electronica prize for their work on the toggle-key saxophone at Bruckner Hall in Linz, Austria. In 2011, they received awards from VSA, NAMM and NAPBIRT at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. More recently, David was in the cast and a band member for the musical soundtrack for BBC's 2016 Paralympics television commercial "We're the Superhumans." The commercial won dozens of international awards, including the Grand Prix at the 2017 Cannes Lion Festival.

Nabb has written articles on music making for people with disabilities for many national and international publications, including the Music Educators Journal, Medical Problems of Performing Artists, Flöte Aktuell, The Flutist Quarterly, The Journal of the American Occupational Therapy Association, and The Journal of Research in Music Education.

Nabb has performed with his toggle-key saxophone at important venues around the world, including the Kennedy Center, Washington DC; Westminster Palace, London; Abbey Road Studios, London; National Theater, Bangkok; Bruckner Hall, Linz; and Colston Hall in Bristol, England.

David Nabb is a Yamaha Performing Artist, and plays exclusively on Eugene Rousseau saxophone mouthpieces.

One-Handed Saxophones: Some Perspective

Serious efforts toward building one-handed woodwind instruments for persons with disabilities date at least from 1814, when Count Rebsomen lost an arm and a leg fighting in Napoleon's army. Rebsomen had at least 3 one-handed flutes built, and one of these built by Cornelius Ward in London has been preserved (Spohr 2008). This of course predates all one-handed saxophones, since the conventional "two-handed" saxophone was not invented until about 1840 (Londiex, 1989).

After World War I the Conn Musical instrument company built perhaps a dozen one-handed saxophones (Cohen, 1987; Horwood, 1989; Incredible, 2005).

Special note should be made of some pioneers in the late 20th Century who promoted one-handed saxophone adaptations. These include the inspirational saxophonist Kenneth Carter. Kenneth Carter played one-handed saxophones adapted by George Theodos and Al Milstone. Furthermore, Hank Demarco and Harry Wentworth played electronically assisted saxophones built at the University of Alberta in Canada.

There are at least 4 instrument builders active today who have built one-handed saxophones. They include Jeff Stelling and Martin Foag, both of whom have instruments represented here today. Additionally Martin Visser of Amsterdam [www.flutelab.com] and Brian Russell of Winneconne Wisconsin USA [www.russellwinds.com] have also built one-handed saxophones that are being played currently.

In recent years, several organizations have dedicated themselves to developing and promoting one-handed musical instruments, including the UNK One-handed Woodwinds Program [http://onehandwinds.unk.edu] and the One Handed Musical Instrument Trust (OHMI)[http://www.ohmi.org.uk/]

Cohen, P. (1987). The one handed saxophone. *Saxophone Journal, 11(4)*, 4-8.

Horwood, W. (1989). A curiosity in F. *Winds: The Journal of the British Association of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles, 4*, 29-30.

"Incredible: One-handed Conn F mezzo soprano" Cybersax accessed 11 April 2005, from, http://www.cybersax.com/One-HandFmez.html

Londiex, J. M. (1985) *Hello! Mr. Sax*. Paris: Leduc.

Spohr P. (2008). Rebsomen's Flutes. *Pan: The Journal of the British Flute Society*. March 2008.

This booklet was printed with funding from the **UNK One-Handed Woodwinds Program**. Please visit our site at **http://onehandwinds.unk.edu.**

The UNK One-Handed Woodwinds Program
http://onehandwinds.unk.edu

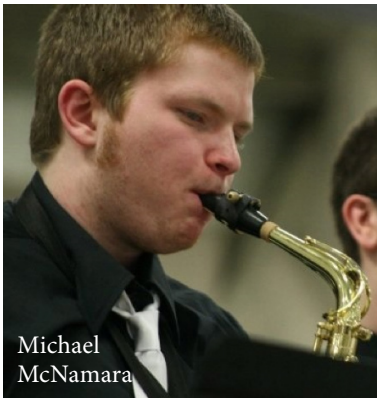
The UNK (University of Nebraska at Kearney) One-Handed Woodwinds Program was created in 2001, when David Nabb returned to university teaching with a Bundy Prototype Toggle-Key saxophone built my Jeff Stelling. David Nabb used this saxophone until his current instrument (a Yamaha YAS 875) had been converted to the Toggle-key mechanism in 2003.

Beginning in 2003, the program has leased the Bundy TKS Prototype saxophone to a series of musicians with disabilities, including Kyungsun Orr (amputee), Renee Weinstein (left arm paralysis from brachial plexus injury), Michael McNamara (brain tumor), and beginning in 2018 Tony Lo (spinal cord injury) of Hawaii.

Since 2003, Jeff Stelling has continued building and improving toggle-key saxophones. He has adapted both left-handed and right-handed models on Yahama, Selmer Mark VII and Selmer S80 Series II body tubes.

As a young man, Tony Lo studied at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, and had an instrumental quartet, ("Tony Lo & The Lodown") before becoming injured in two accidents in 1998. Tony was in a wheelchair for 13 months. (He had played for 38 years before the accidents). The toggle-key saxophone he is leasing from the UNK One-Handed Woodwinds Program will enable Tony to fulfill what had long appeared an unattainable dream, a return to the saxophone.


Tony Lo


Michael McNamara


Kyungsun Orr


Renee Weinstein