

Dearest Freshmen Community

I can't believe it has been over three years since I joined the Four Freshmen! (And I still haven't written anything for Fresh News!!!)

When I joined the group in January of 2015, I was 25 and teaching at Southwestern Community College in Creston, IA, juggling both the Freshmen and teaching for one semester of amazing memories and quite a bit less sleep. My mother, Kay, whom many of you have met at the conventions by now, was an educator for (I believe) 42 years, and it's easy to say her model as an educator was one of the two reasons I knew I had to be a music teacher. The other thing that sealed the deal for me is likely the same reason many of you are here: really great harmony. I was always obsessed. I joined a boy choir when I was in elementary school and haven't stopped trying to ring chords, and slot the right tone since. In middle school, I didn't sing in the actual school choir cause it was just a massive gathering of kids unsure why they have to be there and too concerned with how confusing puberty is to even think about the totally lame music a middle school choir is going to perform. Instead, I joined the school's small vocal ensemble called the Sunrise Singers... a group that met at 6:45am before school to sing... the real nerds. Right where I belonged. (My sister Emily was also in this group.) The boy choir I had sung in was part of a program called Young Voices of Colorado, a group that led to some amazing opportunities, such as being a soprano soloist at Carnegie Hall in 2002, singing at Ground Zero, and many more deeply powerful moments to share and experience music. I stayed with Young Voices until I went to high school, where I was fortunate enough to have a passionate vocal music program. There I was able to really dig into some amazing harmony, led by some wonderful choir directors, and by the time I was 14 I knew I needed to be a choir director, where I could share my love for harmony, and facilitate a space for music and gathering.

After a year in the music education program at the University of Northern Colorado, I realized that the best place for me to dig into the harmony I love was in the corn fields of Iowa to study at Southwestern Community College's School for Music Vocations... in that town I mentioned...

By Tommy Boynton

Creston. 7,000 people, and one of the biggest towns in the southwest corner of Iowa. Aurora, where I grew up, was the 3rd or 4th largest city in Colorado... but the isolation and setting of Creston was perfect. Hang out with people who are ready to be in the middle of nowhere to learn the ways of harmony. Those two years of education were some of the most valuable I can imagine, and if you know anyone who truly loves music and wants it to be a part of their life forever in any capacity, whether its a career, or a best friend forever, I recommend you send them to SWCC. Any level of musician eager to put the time into the vocation is welcome. A guy named Brian Eichenberger also went there in 90s... many of you likely know the rest of that story.

Two of my particularly influential teachers from SWCC went to the New England Conservatory in Boston, and recommend it to me. NEC is a dreamland. I can't express how much I loved my two years in that program.



Initially, I went just to be around people like Fred Hersch, who teaches there, and whose playing I adore more than most things. I went to just maybe see him play, never did I imagine studying with him and performing alongside him. But the endlessly talented and inspiring faculty is just a fraction of how special it was to be there. My peers and best friends became my biggest influences. Playing four square and soccer with musicians like Cristian Budu, Yannick Rafalimanana, and Henrique Eisenmann, all piano players who you should hear (YouTube them). My roommate then and now, Brendan O'Donnell, a fantastic violinist and violist, is still inspiring me to this day. (We have a duo project called The Mimzees, a composition project of mine with a meaningless name where I compose contemporary song cycles for the two of us to play.) My memories and inspirations from those days are still filling me full. Maybe I'll go into some detail in another *Fresh News* someday.

After NEC, I landed a gig as adjunct professor at SWCC. I taught solo jazz voice, guitar, bass, theory, ear training, studio engineering, psychology of success, directed instrumental ensembles, and directed the school's concert choir. I joined a folk band called The River Monks who's front man, Ryan, is still one of my best friends, and I play in his current band, Extravision. At the beginning of my third year teaching, Brian Eichenberger called my boss to see if he knew anyone that could sing and play. I love being part of the Four Freshmen so much. I can't believe my love for harmony, swing, and music has led me to make such great music with such great guys, and I hope it shows when I'm sharing it live. Certainly some day I'll go back to teaching, but for now, I'm enjoying every minute of this: the swing, the harmony, the friendship, and having the time and energy to write music, ride my bicycle, have two amazing cats, and play piano on the side. It's a total dream I never saw coming.

Perhaps the next time I write to you I'll likely just talk about an album I like, or a fond memory, but I wanted to first share a little bit of what led me to the Four Freshmen. Until then, I hope all of you are well, and thank you so much for your years of love for this great music. It's truly special how deeply so many people love the Four Freshmen, and I'm honored to sing the part. May we share this love together in person some day soon!

With love,
Tommy