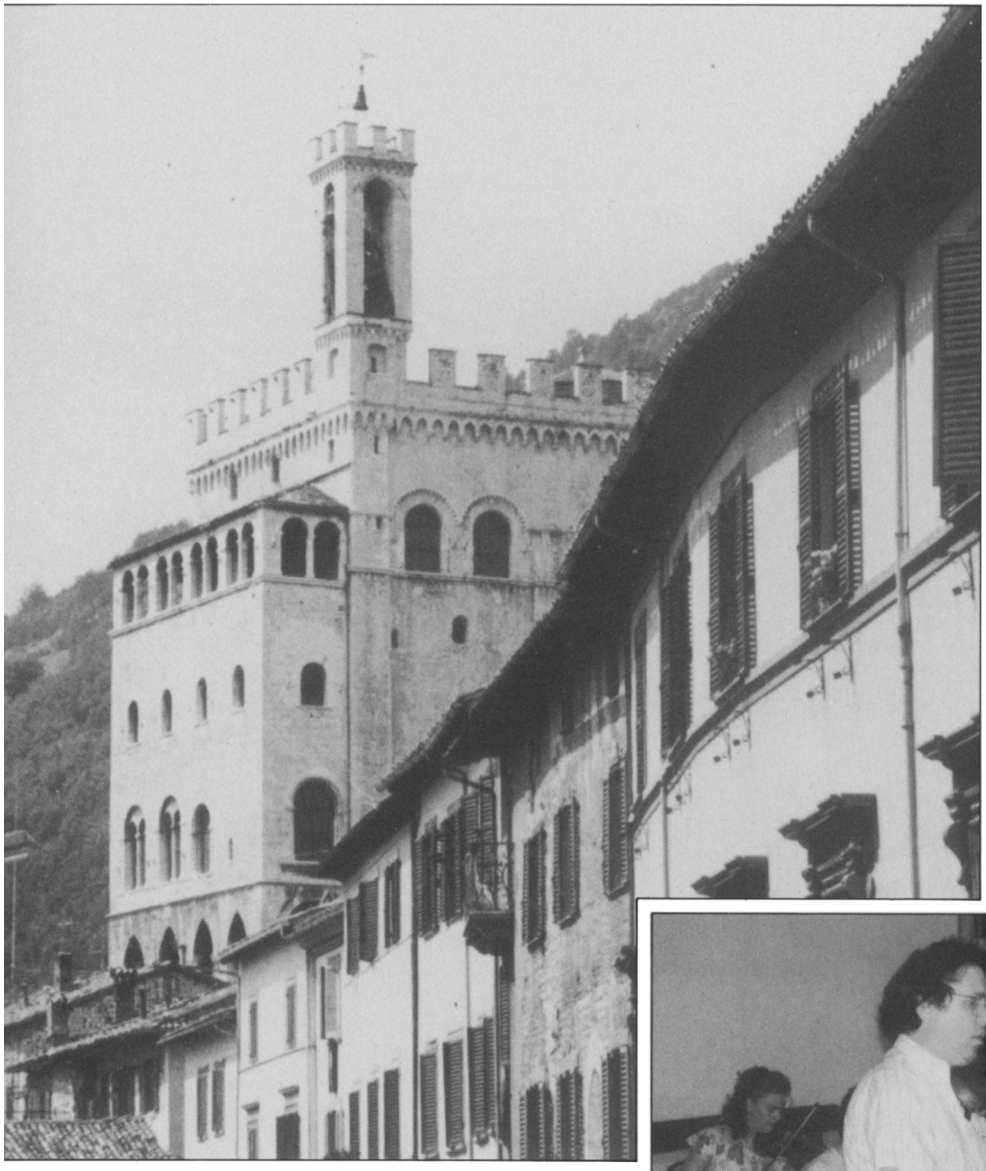
SPECIAL FOCUS

SUMMER STUDY

Escape to a Musical Summer!

by Roger Rideout

What should teachers know about combining travel with music learning or performance? Roger Rideout considers some of the questions no potential music tour leader should overlook.





Photographs courtesy of New York University from the Music in Italy summer abroad program (Gubbio, Italy)

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The best summer experience would be one that combined music with travel and could be used to your professional advantage.

It's February. You are gulping your third cup of coffee in the ten minutes between classes and gazing out the teacher's lounge window, watching the falling snow bury your car in the parking lot. You turn away from the dismal scene, sit on the couch, and pick up a magazine. The copy falls open to a picture of a bronzed couple stretched out on white sands under an azure sky. "That's it!" you yell. "I don't care how many development points I need to earn my two-hundred-dollar raise. I don't care what workshops are being offered in the area. This summer, I'm taking off. This summer, I get away!"

As you rush back to class, certain that this is the summer you will bask in the Caribbean or find treasure at Machu Picchu, you realize that the best summer experience would be one that combined music with travel and could be used to your professional advantage.

A break from the routine

Every summer, thousands of music educators and students attend and participate in music festivals in Europe, South America, and various locations throughout North America. They visit a foreign country and earn academic credit while performing in cathedrals and concert halls in the leading capitals of the world.

Attending a festival abroad can provide a much-needed break from teaching. Intense, short-term study and performance—in a setting far removed from the typical classroom—can renew one's love of music and teaching. The chance to visit a foreign country while performing music under the guidance of a great artist might be the very inspiration required for personal and professional growth.

Some teachers host an ensemble or a select group of performers for tours on the European continent, South America, the Orient, or North America. These tours are arranged through travel agencies in the teachers' own communities or through individuals who represent the festival industry. Generally, these trips are sponsored by the participants themselves, and the travel itself is the main attraction. While such a trip can provide meaningful experiences for students, it is often a headache for the teacher hosting the trip, and it seldom offers any professional advantages such as development points or salary increases.

Get the facts

For teachers who are considering spending a summer observing or participating in a music festival, the primary concern (after cost) should be whether the festival will provide the educational activities that will allow personal and professional growth—both as a teacher and as a musician. Toward that end, would-be travelers should ask a number of questions before undertaking a national or international travel project. For example:

- *How do I find out about festivals?* There are five general sources for this information. While the number grows each year, the major festivals (such as Aspen, Tanglewood, and Charleston's Spoleto Festival) are so well known that any reputable travel agent will have information about costs and accommodations. Travel agents are, however, a limited resource for regional and international festivals. Second, every ensemble director receives literature from travel companies that specialize in arranging tours for musical ensembles. While the majority of the trips

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involve teachers as sponsors, some of the tours allow them to perform as part of the festival vocal and instrumental ensembles. A few phone calls to representatives from these companies should clarify these details. Third, local colleges and universities often sponsor tours as part of their alumni and continuing-education activities. These trips usually carry academic credit, especially if a teacher attends courses or seminars at various locations on the tour. Fourth, teachers can contact the consulates of those countries they wish to visit. These agencies can provide the names and addresses of festival hosts in the native country, and teachers can begin direct negotiations immediately. This approach eliminates the booking agent and is often cheaper—if one speaks the language and has the time to reserve rooms and transportation. Many publications provide useful information for potential travelers (see the list of suggested sources at the end of this article). These magazines and books offer overviews of selected existing festivals, projected costs, and offices to contact for more details. Any of these sources may give you leads to a pleasant summer festival of performance and study.

Festival management

• *Who supports the festival?* Many festivals have been established to attract tourists and to make a profit for the host. Depending on the integrity of the sponsoring agents, participants may have wonderful experiences or may find themselves attending a poorly organized and badly administered festival that has little or no redeeming educational value. A complete itinerary of events should be available on request and should be carefully examined to ensure that the desired musical and educational activities are available. Festivals sponsored by federal governments, national agencies, or regional arts groups are usually preferred to those offered by commercial businesses.

• *What are the lodging accommodations?* Most tours follow a very tight schedule so travelers can see and do as much as possible. Advertisements that list "two days and three nights in Paris" may be misleading. If Paris is fifty kilometers away and no public transportation is available, then the opportunity to see the city and work there is severely curtailed. Whether on a tour or attending a festival, observers and participants should lodge within easy commuting distance of the festival site or in the environs of the host city. Even then, in an effort to cut costs, agencies may book less-than-satisfactory accommodations. Finding that the only bathroom in the hotel is three flights up may dampen one's enthusiasm about the trip.

Concerts and performances

• *What concerts will be given?* For a music festival or tour to provide educational enrichment, participants should hear concerts as well as perform in them. A schedule of cultural events available on the tour or at the festival should be provided by the festival hosts. The costs and availability of tickets to the events should also be noted. In many instances, admission to special concerts featuring visiting soloists or ensembles is included in the registration fees, but sometimes it is not. Potential festival attendees should determine exactly what events are being offered for the costs. As an example, many international festivals attract participants because renowned artists will be present and will be performing or teaching. Knowing whether a great diva will be in residence or merely passing through is important in determining the quality of the musical activities being offered.





• *Where will performances be given?* Many European and South American festivals advertise performance opportunities in the great halls and cathedrals in their country. In reality, one may perform on the steps, but never inside. Also, the "Saal" or local concert hall, while displayed in the advertising brochure as an example of lovely Rococo architecture, may be a dreadful place to perform due to bad acoustics, poor ventilation, or lack of heat. Weeks of work should lead to a crowning performance experience in a special setting; such an opportunity is an attraction in itself. To perform in Notre Dame, St. Mark's, or at the Albert Hall may be the experience of a lifetime; performing in an open field near Stonehenge may be less memorable. Ask whether the festival ensembles will perform within the sites advertised.

Credit and costs

• *Is academic credit available?* Many European and American festivals have summer institutes at which participants can study while attending the festival itself. In turn, many colleges and universities sponsor such institutes or accept continuing-education credits for work completed at festivals or during a travel tour. If one plans to pursue an advanced degree, then one should find out if the festival work/travel can count for academic credit. If teachers need development points within a state or district advancement system, then they should obtain approval prior to registering for the festival.

• *How much will it cost?* As with any purchase, prices vary for transportation and accommodations. The same festival may cost substantially more when booked with one agent than with another. The wise traveler compares several travel packages before agreeing to any one. Finally, talking with a colleague or friend who has participated in a tour or festival is still the best method of determining whether your goals are attainable and what unforetold problems exist with travel, accommodations, passports, money exchanges, hidden costs, and so forth. Spending the time to seek out such information before you decide which tour to take or which festival to attend can make summer travel and music making the special, unforgettable experience you desire.

Chance of a lifetime

Combining music and travel can be a chance for you, your colleagues, and your students to broaden personal horizons and experience music in new ways. The change of pace can invigorate you, and the new perspectives you acquire from travel can be a source of tremendous enrichment on many levels. The chance to meet people from other backgrounds can enhance your communications and teaching skills and permit you to return to your job refreshed and renewed. Sharing music across national boundaries can be highly satisfying for both you and your group.

Start exploring the possibilities of blending summer travel and music. A world of personal and professional adventure awaits you!

Suggested sources

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