

The What, How, and Why of Navarro River String Camp

At the heart of our intention for Navarro River String Camp is the creation of a musical community of mutual enjoyment, appreciation, learning, and support. The majority of people attending Navarro River String Camp have either taken up their instruments later in life or have returned to playing after many years of not playing, and are pursuing music for enjoyment and enrichment and not in quest of professional careers. The competitive edge that is distasteful to many of us who have made our careers as musicians has no place at Navarro River String Camp.

Our goal is to improve the skills of string players who wish to make music in ensembles. The skill set for ensemble playing overlaps with, but differs from, the skills acquired through individual lessons in which the emphasis lies more with technical advancement through playing solo etudes and pieces. Making progress in ensemble playing is far more complex than merely playing more and more difficult notes, and that is why at NRSC we offer classes that speak to many other fundamental aspects of making music with others.

On receiving applications for string camp we do our utmost to create ensembles composed of compatible players and to give each ensemble a choice of suitable music to play. In creating compatible groups we take into account personalities and playing experience either known to us through previous camps or described to us by the players and their teachers.

Most players would probably choose to be in a group with slightly stronger players than themselves, in order to have the experience of being carried along by a strong and supportive group. True, a player might not want his/her cohorts to be too much stronger, for fear of holding the group back, letting the others down, feeling inadequate, etc; but when the balance is right, playing with stronger players can be hugely inspiring and fun. We would, of course, like everyone to experience this kind of musical bliss at some point, but logic tells us that not everyone will have this experience at every camp!

There will be times when a player discovers she/he is the strongest player among weaker players, and that is one of the most challenging positions for any player to be in, a position that calls for strength of character as well as confidence in one's playing ability.

And while our intention is to promote a sense of supportive group learning, we don't want anyone to struggle with a situation that is inherently unworkable. Thus for any player who finds him/herself in a group that even with the best will in the world does not work for him/her, we will do everything we can to resolve the situation to everyone's benefit and satisfaction; but to do this we have to rely on players to communicate with us throughout the inevitable ups and downs of the intense experience that is string camp.

As we enter our second decade, we are amazed to look back over the marvelous evolution and transformation of Navarro River String Camp, and we are greatly heartened by the many ways in which our campers have responded to our desire to create a loving and supportive community of musicians.