



# NEWS

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **El Camino College Student Composer Wins International Competition**

El Camino College student and composer Nicholas Sobko's latest work has been described as "powerful" and "fluent." Sobko calls it "fun."

Sobko's current composition is all of these things, and more. It caught the attention of judges at the 32<sup>nd</sup> annual Berlin "Marschieren Sie Komponisten Konkurrenz" sponsored by the Berlin Großartiges Konzertband. Sobko won first place among 873 applicants worldwide – the first American to win the award.

The international competition asked participants to write a German-style march, custom-made for the Berlin Großartiges Konzertband. Compositions were judged in seven categories: form, accuracy to the German style, feel, orchestration, crowd appeal, judges' appeal, and creativity. Before he started this project, Sobko listened to a bit of German folk music, but mainly, he went with his instincts. The result was a winning piece that comes with a 450-euro award, about \$640 American.

Sobko's march will receive its American premiere at the El Camino College Concert Band performance scheduled for 3 p.m. May 22 at the college's Marsee Auditorium. Sobko plays all woodwind instruments, and will play bassoon at the performance.

"Reading the judges' notes, I think what they liked was my interpretation of German music as an American composer," said Sobko, who grew up in Torrance and got his start in music through school programs.

"My composition is more of hybrid march; it is a German march, but I mixed in some ideas from a German folk song, a little bit of polka, and it has four measures of the German national anthem at the very end. It also features two soloists, which is unusual for a march. I am not fluent in this kind of music – I just went with what I felt would work. I think the judges saw that I was having fun with it."

The "fun" theme is certainly seen in the title: "March of the Brewski Brothers: A Tribute to the Greatest Gifts Germany Gave to the World, Beethoven, Oktoberfest, and Beer."

A rough translation from the German judges' notes says that Sobko's "orchestration skills hold a powerful presence and at no point did the band overpower the soloists. At no time was there a gap or weakness, because the orchestration was very fluent."

Sobko composed his first piece of music when he was 8 years old – a saxophone duet. He played sax at the time, so this was a natural starting point. He graduated to a woodwind choir piece in middle school, and has been progressing ever since, writing chamber music for small ensembles, then bigger ensembles, and then far into the other end of the spectrum. Several of his compositions have premiered at ECC, and he has completed numerous commissions from Japan, Russia, and other countries, as well as the United States.

“Nick is a very creative and imaginative composer and musician,” said Dane Teter, director of instrumental music at ECC. “He is accomplished well beyond his years when compared to other university composition students. We have premiered nearly a dozen of his compositions at El Camino College, either by the Symphony Orchestra, Concert Band, or chamber ensembles. Nick composes tirelessly. He is developing his own, unique sound and approach to composition. He is an accomplished arranger of music as well.”

Though Sobko enjoys playing instruments, he prefers composing. He considers himself “semi-professional,” and as he studies at ECC, he has published more than 20 pieces of various orchestrations. While he continues composing, he plans to further his music education and is currently one of 50 finalists at the Boston Conservatory – he was chosen from among 12,000 applicants and is now hoping to earn one of the 25 open spots in the music division.

Musicality runs in his family – his mother played in a rock n’ roll garage band and his grandmother tried her hand at composing. His father played violin and guitar on the amateur level; his grandfather played first violin for the Detroit Symphony, and with Henry Ford’s Traveling Orchestra.

Though he doesn’t completely agree with the assessment, Sobko has been told that his composing style is “neo-romantic.” This is to say that he models old school writings from the Romantic period, and infuses them with his own new ideas.

“To me, writing music is like a language, more than anything else,” he said. “It is one thing to play or listen. To write, it is like a language and my job as a composer is to communicate thoughts and ideas. If people don’t get it, then I am not doing my job. Audiences need to understand and I feel what I am trying to say creatively.”

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