

Kenneth Simpson
Percussionist - National Arts Centre Orchestra

When did you begin your studies as a percussionist?

I started as a piano player and studied that instrument for 14 years. It wasn't until I was 22 years old that I made the switch over to percussion. That was very late but I had a good grounding in piano before I picked up any drumsticks.

Describe a typical workweek.

Every week is different and the concert schedules are also different. I teach at the University of Ottawa so some days I do that and on other days I can do some practicing and rehearsing and concerts. That's the neat thing about this job. Every week, every day is different from the previous ones. There is a lot of variety in my life.

What are the NACO Young People Concerts?

The concerts that we do for young people are often some of the most difficult ones we do. They usually consist of five to ten pieces that are extremely hard. They are meant to showcase a kind of music or a certain section in the orchestra. There is a level of difficulty in these concerts that is often not found in the others that could go on for two or three hours. They can all be difficult but the children's concerts are one hour of very hard things.

What skills does a student need to become an exceptional musician?

To be an exceptional musician you have to have exquisite technique and exquisite musicality. It takes a very high level of understanding of what you are doing, while at the same time being able to listen to what your colleagues are doing. It's not just about the individual. It's about working as a group. Like in sports, what is important is "the team effort".