

Making Music with an Italian Master

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"Americano" Chris Foss '13 in front of the Duomo of Milan.

When Chris Foss '13 took a master class with Giorgio Versiglia, he never expected that he'd end up going to Italy to study with the Italian bassoonist and music professor.

But that's exactly what happened. Foss met Versiglia in January 2011 at [Double Reed Day](#), an annual event for bassoonists and oboists organized by Janet Polk, Foss's bassoon teacher at UNH. Versiglia, who attended as a guest artist, suggested to Foss and a couple of other students that they would benefit from studying with him in Italy. A

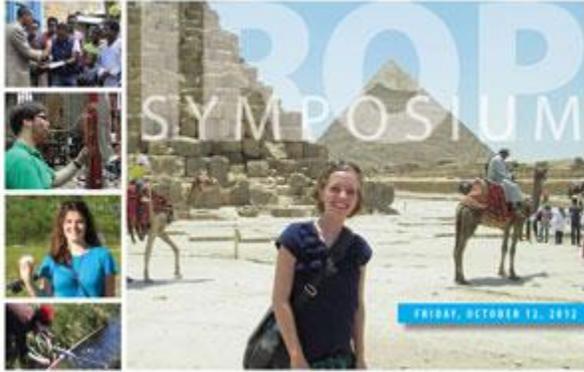
year and a half later, Foss was able to accept that invitation after receiving an [International Research Opportunities Program](#) grant from the [Hamel Center](#). He headed to the town of Sarnico, in northern Italy, to explore the influence of Italian culture on the country's bassoon playing.

"I wasn't aware that the approach to how you play the instrument and how you learn to play the instrument could be so different abroad," says Foss, a music performance major who also spoke about his experience at a public lecture last Saturday. For instance, "The opera is very much alive in Italy, and the cultural importance they place on opera I think influences the contemporary instrumental style."

In fact, before leaving for Italy, Foss learned from Versiglia that they'd be playing together in the opera *Assassinio nella Cattedrale* (Murder in the Cathedral) by Ildebrando Pizzetti. After a couple of practice sessions, he found out that the performance would be in [Milan's Duomo](#), which took five centuries to build and is the fourth-largest cathedral in the world. "It was an incredible shock," he says. "And an amazing experience to walk into such a huge piece of culture and history, and to experience the sound in that place, and to know that echoing along with the music are all the stories of the people in that space. There was a certain weight to the air and stone."

There were also lighter moments: When the performers received nametags, Foss's read "Americano" rather than Chris.

Besides taking private lessons from Versiglia and one of his former students, Foss shadowed his mentor as he taught, rehearsed and performed. As is generally the case in Italy, Versiglia's teaching method tended to focus first on technical mastery of the instrument, followed by the development of musical repertoire. In addition, Versiglia is redesigning some of the standard equipment for making reeds, which form the mouthpiece of the bassoon, and Foss accompanied him to Milan to visit a company that processes materials for reed making. "I was able to use differences in his style of reed making to explain differences in his style of playing," Foss says.



EACH YEAR IN OCTOBER, THE HAMEL CENTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH MARKS THE ACADEMIC HOMECOMING OF IROP STUDENTS WITH THE IROP SYMPOSIUM, BRIEF ILLUSTRATED RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS CRAFTED FOR A GENERAL AUDIENCE OF FACULTY, STUDENTS, ADMINISTRATORS, SUPPORTERS, FAMILIES, AND INVITED GUESTS. [THE SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM WILL BE HELD DURING HOMECOMING ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, FROM 2-5 P.M. IN MUB THEATRES 1 AND 2.](#)

Foss also makes his own reeds—more than 400 so far over his college career—and had received two other grants from the Hamel Center to study reed making for bassoon. “I’ve learned to use my air in a different way while studying over there, and to integrate that new technique into an American style of reed making is a challenge I’m facing now,” he says. “I want to play in a way that’s appropriate for an American orchestra, but that also incorporates the most useful information I gathered from the Italian style.”

Foss believes that his IROP experience ultimately will have an impact on what he hopes will be a career teaching bassoon as a college professor. “I see all the work I’ve put into reed making and my studies this summer in Italy as being a direct advantage to my future students—and I can see myself adapting some of his [Versiglia’s] techniques for teaching the instrument.”

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