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Furman University

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Meritorious Teacher: Dan Koppelman

A Q&A with the Furman music professor, recipient of the 2011 Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching.

Hometown: San Diego, Calif.

College: San Francisco State University, Class of '81

Major: Music (Piano Performance)

Arrived at Furman: 1996



JEREMY FLEMING

What sparked your interest in music technology?

I have always loved gadgets and enjoyed working with numbers and solving puzzles. When I was pursuing my master's degree at Indiana, a friend had an early model of the Macintosh computer and some music software. When he showed me what you could do — record yourself playing something, hear it back instantly, edit the notes, change the sounds — I was amazed. I realized immediately that this seemed to bring together my interests in music, gadgets and numbers. I had been bitten by the music tech bug!

You're a product of large state universities.

What drew you to Furman?

I really didn't know anything about Furman until I saw an advertisement in the College Music Society's "Music Vacancy List." I have learned to appreciate the beauty of a smaller institution, with more personal contact, closer student-faculty interactions, and a streamlined administrative structure.

Are today's students different from when you first arrived at Furman?

In terms of technology, today's students are way ahead of where they were in '96. In my Introduction to Music Technology course, I used to ask on the first day of class, "How many of you have never used a computer?" A few hands would go up. Then I would ask, "How many of you

have never used a Macintosh?" Almost every hand in the room would go up. Most had never used a computer for anything musical.

By contrast, today's music students have been working with digital music files for years. Most freshmen have played with music notation software, and many of them have already done some composing with loop-based programs such as Apple's GarageBand. A few even have professional-level home studios!

On the other hand, I see a greater number of freshman music majors nowadays who have had little or no instruction in basic, rudimentary musicianship skills. I'm not sure whether this is due to budget cuts in school music programs or the "instant gratification" that music software can provide, but it is palpable.

Talk about your "piano plus electronics" collaboration with your wife, Furman professor Ruth Neville, as duo *runedako*. What does the phrase mean?

Ruth and I met as doctoral students at the University of California-San Diego in the late 1980s. At the time we decided to form a duo, there was a famous athlete named Florence Griffith-Joyner, who was known as "Flo-Jo." I began to experiment with different arrangements of the opening syllables of our names, and came up with ru(th) ne(ville) da(niel) ko(ppelman): *runedako*!

We really enjoy performing together. We share the responsibilities of the duo (Ruth's the artistic director, I'm the technical advisor), and when we travel for performing engagements we get to have a little mini-vacation together. The biggest challenge is when we disagree about the interpretation of a piece. When that happens it is very important to keep one's perspective, and not take a musical difference of opinion as a personal affront to one's taste.

Excerpt from a letter nominating Koppelman for the award:

"Not only a fantastic teacher and mentor, Dr. Koppelman is also an inspirational pianist. He could easily find a position at one of the country's top music schools due to his elite training and multiple fields of expertise, from computers and computer music to music theory, history and composition, piano performance, and pedagogy. It is truly a blessing to have him on the faculty."

"Recombinant Nocturnes," duo runedako's latest CD on the Innova label, is available on iTunes. Visit <http://runedako.blogspot.com> to read about the duo's experiences as Fulbright scholars in Ukraine in 2008–09.