

# MAKING WAVES AT DCS



## “Dreadnaught” Finally Sets Sail with the DHS Chamber Orchestra

*Orchestra Debuts Commissioned Piece*



After being shelved for over 2 years due to the pandemic, the Dexter High School Chamber Orchestra debuted a commissioned work entitled “Dreadnaught” at their spring concert held on May 25. Written specifically for the DHS Chamber Orchestra in 2019 by Associate Professor and Chair of Music Education at the University of Michigan Michael Hopkins, the seven-minute piece was set to premiere on March 17, 2020 - one week after school buildings across the U.S. were closed the remainder of the year.

The long-awaited performance received a standing ovation from a full house of exhilarated family and friends. Taking the podium following a beautiful program from the DHS Concert Orchestra, Hopkins spoke about the significant involvement of Dexter students in composing this piece, and the collective excitement at finally performing the piece for an audience.

[Link to Audio File](#)

### *Special Note:*

The May 25<sup>th</sup> concert marked the first time the Dexter orchestra program has performed a piece commissioned specifically for its musicians. This historic event was made even more special by the announcement of the renaming of



the annual orchestra booster scholarship to honor the founding of the DCS orchestra program in 1994. The Don and Sally Parrish Orchestra Booster Scholarship is named for former Dexter Schools orchestra director Don Parrish, who began the program after being hired as an assistant band director in the early nineties. Since then, Dexter orchestras have been invited to perform at prestigious conferences and festivals across the state and region, and the high school orchestra has taken performance tours to Orlando, New York, England, Italy, Germany, and Ireland.

Parrish served as director of the orchestra program for 19 years before retiring in 2003, after which he went on to found the Dexter Community Orchestra in 2005. His wife, Sally, has been a major supporter of the orchestra program, both before and after Don’s passing in 2011. Sally and her family were in the audience for the awarding of the first Don and Sally Parrish Orchestra Booster Scholarship to senior Thomas Champine, who will be pursuing audio engineering and computer science after graduation.



*DHS Orchestra Director Matt Deloria and Sally Parrish*

*Excerpt from a DCS News & Notes article published in February 2020 (edited for clarity):*

Working directly with the composer to perform a piece of music is an exciting experience for any musician. For high school students to participate in the composition process, contributing ideas for specific instrumentation (*please, feature the violas!*) and technical aspects like fast runs and shifting, opportunities such as this are extremely rare. Hopkins sat down with Chamber students in early October 2019 to find out what they would like to see in the music. Having input during the process was a unique learning experience for the student musicians, and the resulting piece incorporates much of what they requested.

February 2020 marked the first time Hopkins heard “Dreadnaught” played by live musicians. As he uses a computer program to compose, the music can be replayed electronically, but hearing it with real instruments is a much different experience. He prefaced the rehearsal by telling students he tried to incorporate everything they had requested in their initial meeting. One request was that the piece feature the violas, a section not often highlighted in orchestral works. Hopkins took those words to heart and wrote a section where the violas take center stage.

As they played, Hopkins shared insights into how the piece was created. “At first, and for a long time after, it was a simpler idea,” he told students. Hopkins added more ornamentation as he went along; “it started with a simple idea; but decorated, it reminds me a bit of a fiddle tune,” he shared.

Entitled “Dreadnaught,” he wrote the piece influenced by the city of Dexter. It begins with a pastoral feel, conjuring images of “rivers, parks, apples falling from trees, children running.”

Then after a while, the feeling changes, and after a brief period of suspense, the music turns playful and delicate, happy-sounding. When Hopkins asked the students how they would describe the character of the happy section, one volunteered, “Dexter Daze,” and he agreed it had the sound of a festival or dance.

Throughout that first hour-long rehearsal, Hopkins discovered areas where minor changes were required, such as altering dynamic markings (soft vs. loud), sustaining notes and adding instrumentation. It was an enlightening opportunity for students to see how a composer can fine-tune their music on the fly. Hopkins ultimately decided adjustments needed to be made, which he will complete and have back to the students in quick order for their concert preparations.

“It's an incredible honor to have a composer of Michael Hopkins' stature out to work with our DHS students and compose a piece for the Chamber Orchestra,” said DHS Orchestra Director Matt Deloria. “The students really appreciated being able to hear directly from the composer. We heard the stories behind the music, the inspirations, the intentions. It's an opportunity to see behind the curtain and it was a huge treat for all of us.”