

A Little Night Music

Wind Symphony to debut “Old Ben’s Farm” Friday

Thursday, September 29, 2016



MEMBERS OF THE UNH WIND SYMPHONY DURING A RECENT REHEARSAL

Editor's note: After this article was published, the Wind Symphony premiered "Old Ben's Farm" at the Whittemore Center Arena before a full crowd assembled to usher in UNH's 150th year on Sept. 30. [Video](#)

When Andrew Boysen was commissioned to write an original piece of music

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celebrating UNH's 150th anniversary, he wanted to avoid the familiar. The usual ideas presented themselves — using the alma mater or one of UNH's fight songs as a basis.



UNH WIND SYMPHONY DIRECTOR
ANDREW BOYSEN

“I wanted a different way of incorporating the university into the piece without being quite so obvious,” says the UNH music professor.

And so, at the end of the spring 2016 semester, Boysen, who conducts the UNH Wind Symphony, asked student musicians for suggestions. What better way, he thought, to capture the university's spirit than by talking to students themselves?

Boysen says that collaboration helped him find the musical language for “Old Ben's Farm,” an energetic fanfare that pays tribute to the university's past, present and future. Boysen and the Wind Symphony will debut the piece on Friday, Sept. 30, at the Whittemore Center as part of the launch of UNH's sesquicentennial observance, [Celebrate 150](#).

Traditionally, fanfares are flashy and upbeat, Boysen says, and “Old Ben's Farm” is no exception. But under the soaring notes is a hidden musical message. The main theme of the piece is a musical spelling of Wild E. Cat, the university's mascot. It's something of a musical cryptogram, Boysen says — using the seven notes in a scale as a base (A, B, C, D, E, F and G), a composer can spell words musically. The letter H becomes an A note, I becomes a B, and so on.

“The whole piece is structured from that. It's not something that's

going to make you say, ‘Oh, that says Wild E. Cat,’” but it gives you a reason for doing what you’re doing,” Boysen says.

Brandon Duras '17, a music education major who plays trumpet in the Wind Symphony, provided the suggestion that helped Boysen start writing the piece. “When he told me, I kind of laughed,” Duras says. “It was sort of a spur-of-the-moment thing.”

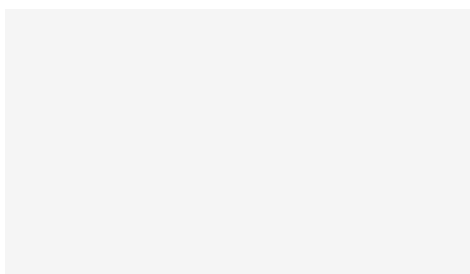
“This is definitely a highlight of my musical career, being able to debut a piece for such a momentous occasion.”

Duras and the Wind Symphony have been rehearsing “Old Ben’s Farm” since the beginning of September. For Duras, the piece is friendly and full of energy, which is “the vibe I get from everyone on campus and all the different departments across the university,” he says. “This is definitely a highlight of my musical career, being able to debut a piece for such a

momentous occasion.”

Boysen wrote the piece during the summer; he sat at his piano and scribbled ideas in a sketchbook. Even after settling on the musical spelling idea, Boysen says it took a few tries to find his path to the composition. “For me, a lot of it’s about planning the structure. When I talk to people about composition, a lot of time I talk about how, when you first learn to write an essay, you have your main point and then your supporting points. There’s a certain kind of truth to that — there’s what you want people to feel when they hear the piece, and then everything else is supporting details.”

The title itself is a reference to the university’s beginnings — the campus was built on land once owned by farmer Benjamin



Thompson, who bequeathed his land to the university in the late 1800s.

“The piece really brings in so many aspects of the university’s history,” says Emily Silva ’17, a music education major who plays clarinet in the Wind

Symphony and is a drum major in the Wildcat Marching Band. “It’s a really cool take on this university, which is such a big part of all of our lives.”

This is only the second time Boysen has written an original piece for the Wind Symphony, and he says the chance to write for his students has been an honor.

“The best part of my job is conducting the Wind Symphony,” he says.

Video: UNH Wind Symphony premieres "Old Ben's Farm" at Hear Us Roar event on Sept. 30, 2016.



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WRITTEN [Larry Clow '12G](#) | UNH Cooperative Extension

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