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Community Tunes In To New Music-Outreach Program



Campus News

by Michelle Simmons

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As high-stakes standardized testing continues to drive K-12 curricula toward more math, science and English, schools are being forced to cut arts and music programs from already overstretched budgets. The launching of the Dickinson College Music Outreach Program is more than timely—it's critical. Funded through a generous gift from Mary Stuart Smith '69, the program developed by the Department of Music began offering recitals, concerts and workshops in the Carlisle Area School District last fall and expanded its program this spring to include neighboring Boiling Springs and Cumberland Valley school districts.



Dickinson launched its music-outreach program last September with a performance by the faculty wind quintet at Carlisle High School. "We're very mobile as music ensembles," said Blanka Bednarz. "We're able to go to the schools and fit their schedules."

"What the department's been working on for a long time has been trying to find stronger connections with the community," said Robert Pound, associate professor and chair of music. "With the outreach program, the circumstances have come to be right. We have 30 [tenured and adjunct] faculty members who are all actively engaged in performing on campus and in the area."

The program began last September with a concert by the Dickinson faculty wind quintet at Carlisle Area High School. Concerts throughout the year included performances by the string quartet, the brass quintet, the jazz quartet and the Florestan Recital Project, a Boston-based collective of performers who became musical-artists-in-residence at Dickinson in 2007.

Aubrey Holmes '11, a music major, is part of the Dickinson string quartet that performed in October. He saw the program as an opportunity not only to perform for a different audience but also to provide a community service and to learn teaching skills. He and fellow string-quartet member Brayden Downing '13 will expand their community service this fall by offering violin coaching to area elementary-school students.

Blanka Bednarz, associate professor of music and the program coordinator, schedules performances at several schools to ensure wide access. "One of our premises with the music-outreach program was to reach not only students already involved in music but to reach those who do not currently play instruments," she said. "In these settings, the performers welcome all kinds of questions," she continued. "They're often of a personal nature, such as 'How long have you been playing?' These are the sorts of things students wonder about and never have a chance to ask in a formal situation."

During an April concert at Carlisle Area High School, each member of the Dickinson faculty jazz quartet explained his instrument's role in the quartet—from the bass's walking bass line to the piano setting the harmonic structure for the song—and fielded questions from a rapt audience. Students were stunned to learn that although the quartet had been together only three years, the musicians collectively had close to a century's worth of experience.

"This is very enlightening for the kids," said Dave Rohrer, the school district's music director. "It's a great opportunity for them to hear something they wouldn't ordinarily hear—and in an intimate setting. The kids are just blown away."