

Backstage at a concert, it's calm down, tune up, and it's music!

by Amy Eisenman
STAFF WRITER

At 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 10, the Downers Grove South High School parking lot, 1436 Norfolk St., was a zoo.

Brave parents dropped their children off to perform in the Community High School District 99 Holiday Concert. This concert combined the District 99 orchestra, choirs and symphonic bands. The parking lot of Downers Grove South was swarmed with cars dropping off students, then prowling around for spots.

The hallways of Downers Grove South were a sea of white blouses, black dresses and tuxedos. As they squeezed through the hallways, it was amazing that students got herded to the right places. The District 99 concert looked more like a stampede waiting to happen rather than a serene evening of holiday music.

Confused knots of students hung around

the hallways, waiting for instructions... nervousness.

"It's time to go to the auditorium," music teacher Todd Tomashek informed groups of students. They began to shuffle obediently into the auditorium to warm up.

In the auditorium, choir director Diane Hires smiled calmly in front of 325 nervous students and began to quiet them and warm up their voices.

"It's a behemoth undertaking to get 600 people in one place," she said.

This was evident from some of the late-comers, who were dashing down the hall to the auditorium while their friends laughed at them.

"It is physically impossible for me to be on time!" one girl shouted over her shoulder to her amused friends on the way to the auditorium.

Students burst into the auditorium as Hires began to warm up the choir, not only for musical purposes but also to quell

"To calm them, I answer their questions and keep them busy. It's a matter of channeling their energy and focus," she said.

There were those who were lost, and Hires told the students to help each other out.

"If you see someone coming in and looking lost, please wave to them," she said.

The choir stood up and sang, "B-B-B-B-B" to piano music to warm up. The girls were tying decorative red ribbons around their neck and singing.

"I'm seeing too much ribbon-tying. I need you to sing," Hires said.

Kat Eggleston, who was playing the hammer dulcimer with the choir to "The Kalanta of the New Year," began to play. Hands dropped from necks and voices grew stronger, but not strong enough.

"Harder, altos!" she ordered. She cut them off.

"OK. You're hesitating because you can't hear the instrument. During the performance it will be miked, so you will be able to hear it," she added.

She brought the microphone to the dulcimer and voices grew louder, more confident. Hires smiled, pleased with their strong sound.

"Nervousness has to do with respect for the moment. That's really it. I warm them up and just focus at the task at hand," she said.

Meanwhile, down the hall in the band room it sounded like pandemonium. Instruments were honking, students were running around, wind players were sucking on reeds. Everyone looked nervous and was trying not to.

Sophomore clarinet player Kim Robinson clutched her Normandy clarinet and wondered what to do.

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Every instrument tunes up differently; junior Alex Urbaniec (left) greases his bass trombone slide while violinists (right, from left) Nikki Giocola, Jenny Rafacz and Elizabeth Herman run through their scales.

Band

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"I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing because I'm in choir too," she laughed.

That seemed to be a problem for students involved in several of the groups performing that evening. Michelle Ho, a senior who plays violin in the orchestra, is also in the choir and the dance group. She had figured out her strategy for making her marks.

"I'm going to be coming out with the orchestra first. When they play 'Sleigh Ride,' I'll be out with the dance group. Then with the dance group, I'll be getting my costume on backstage for dance choir," she said.

Back in the band room, things were starting to get serious.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to be the only one talking now. I would like to be your source of focus and guidance. Stop your own agenda right now. Concert B-flat scale please," conductor Craig Roselieb said.

The band started running up its scales. Amid the warm-up, senior trumpet player Erin Latto felt a little sad about this concert, as it was going to be one of her last.

"This is my last concert. We're playing with the orchestra. It's special to get up and play with the orchestra," she said.

Latto said that preparation is the key to not being nervous.

"I practiced — a lot!" she said.

"We have tough music. I practiced one to two hours a day, sometimes more," she said.

As she spoke, a small crisis was brewing for senior bassoon player Emily Dunham. She was fran-



Junior Jeff Dalo tunes up his cello.

PHOTO BY RICK TAPIO

tically photocopying her music for the performance.

"My stand partner forgot his music, and we have a really bad page turn. He came up to me and said, 'I don't have the music!' So I have to copy it," she said. She was relieved when she finished.

"Hallelujah! I've got it!" she exclaimed and ran off to the orchestra room.

When it came time for the performance, it went almost without a hitch, except for a technical difficulty. During senior Bridget Frodyma's solo in "Silent Night," the microphone was not turned on. Hires stopped the performance to fix the problem.

"I went up to sing, and I started singing, and the mike wasn't on, and I said, 'Oh, well, something's not happening here.'"

Hires halted the performance and had Frodyma start over.

"We were recording it. It was her moment. It was such a beautiful solo, and I did not want the

audience to miss it," Hires said.

"It was just a problem. That's life," she added.

Frodyma was unfazed by the difficulty.

"I just kept singing, because as they say on Broadway, the show must go on," she said.

Frodyma was glad Hires stopped the performance.

"I was halfway through the solo, and I thought, 'Should I raise my hand like an idiot?' I was really grateful that she did that," she said.

While she enjoyed performing, Frodyma was glad when it was over.

"I was incredibly nervous. My parents and friends were sitting in the gym, and it's like exposing yourself because people feel shy about their true voice," she said.

Hires called the concert a success.

"When a concert goes really well, there's a connection with the audience and the performers. That's really satisfying," she said.