

Conductor John Dodson leads the Adrian Symphony Orchestra, the professional orchestra-in-residence at Adrian College.



Soup, Salad & Symphony

Adrian and the orchestra

by john dodson

It is 11:55 a.m. on a Thursday, and I'm waiting in Ritchie Dining Hall with a mix of excitement and anticipation.

As the minutes tick away students are coming through the doors from the cafeteria, many carrying their lunch trays. I see faculty members, administrators and staff with their bowls of soup and plates of salad. There are friends from Plant Operations and members of the secretarial staff. Gradually the room fills with between 40 and 60 people drawn from across the campus. They greet each other, visit together and amble over to round tables where they sit down and begin to enjoy their lunches. Sometimes it occurs to me that this may be the only time in their college careers when such a combination of students, support staff, faculty and administrators will be in one room sitting together as equals.

At noon, "Soup, Salad and Symphony" begins. Using a portable stereo, I begin to play a CD. Music fills the room, and, using a microphone to talk over it, I begin to teach. Over the sounds of clinking forks, we are doing what very few people ever get the opportunity to do: listen intelligently to music and learn about it before it is performed.

The room is quiet during the presentation, and I try to remember that I have a widely diverse audience – from senior music majors who have a broad knowledge of music history to the novice trying out classical music for the first time. Students, staff and faculty at Adrian College may attend many of the concerts held in Dawson Auditorium, for free. During the course of the season they might hear a classical program, a candlelight holidays program or a pops concert.

Sometimes students have written me notes after these programs, and I can't help believing that they just might include great music in their lives long after their days at Adrian College have ended. As for the faculty, staff, and administration,

having outstanding soloists come to the campus as guest artists, and hearing concerts by an orchestra of professional musicians, has to impact the quality of life for those who teach here for many years.

The orchestra receives in-kind support from the College – office and rehearsal space – and it gives something back in return: the opportunity to hear live music performed at a professional level. In total the orchestra performs more than a dozen concerts in Adrian and Tecumseh. There are classical and pops concerts, unique programs such as Casual Classics and Brunch with the Classics, and a concert devoted to families. In addition, the orchestra performs special education programs for area school children, and participates in collaborative projects like the Nutcracker series in Tecumseh Civic Auditorium.

The clock keeps ticking and it's 12:50. I try to finish the lunch on time so that everyone can get back to their offices, classrooms and desks.

The room empties, and it is my hope that those who were here are not the same as they were when they entered. In that sense, the missions of the orchestra and the College coexist perfectly. The goal of each is to change lives through the accumulation of new knowledge and the act of reflecting upon new and enriching experiences. The uniqueness of this collaboration is that those experiences are not confined to the classroom, but may be found in the auditorium and at events like this one.

John Dodson is music director of the Adrian Symphony Orchestra, and is also a member of the Adrian College music faculty.