



Four Saxophones for Six Suites

Developing the Saxophone as a Classical Instrument

Three years ago, Andrew Dahlke, associate professor of Music, began researching Johann Sebastian Bach's *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*, some of the most performed and recognizable solo compositions ever written for the cello. Recently he became the first musician to transcribe and professionally record Bach's cello suites using four different types of saxophones.

Previously, the suites had been transcribed and recorded using a variety of instruments, including a single style of saxophone. However, Dr. Dahlke, to his knowledge, is the first musician to transcribe them and professionally record them using a soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophone. He began his research by studying the suites in literature and listening to numerous recordings of them before studying how famous Russian cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich, played the suites.

"As a saxophonist I thought a really great starting point would be to study how a master cellist actually plays the suites," Dr. Dahlke said. "That was a big part of the project — to put on the music and literally transcribe every phrase marking, every nuance that he put into the suites." Those nuances helped determine which type of saxophone he chose for each suite.

Transcribing Rostropovich's performance took Dr. Dahlke a year but was worth the effort because he developed a solid foundation for interpretation and felt confident when it came to his own interpretation of the suites. He then took his project to recording engineer and producer Scott Burgess of the White Pine Music record label at Central Michigan University, who had expressed interest in his work. Funding through the UNC's Faculty Research and Publication Board helped pay for his travel costs and enabled Dr. Dahlke to work collaboratively with the label to record his first solo CD.

UNC students learn from his creative efforts. "Spending that much time studying the suites and learning about them has really enhanced what I am able to offer my own students here," he said.

The energetic musician also devotes time to the Capitol Quartet, a saxophone quartet of four professors from universities around the country. The group divides its time playing with symphony orchestras, doing recitals, and performing small, community concerts all over the United States. "Community concerts bring music to rural places that don't have access to the major metropolitan areas filled with culture and arts," Dr. Dahlke said. "Those are really fun." When performing at a college or university, the quartet offers master classes for music students.

"I'll have some of the guys in the quartet who are professors from other schools work with my own students, who have music prepared for them," Dr. Dahlke said. "After the students perform they get feedback from the professors and the audience in a classroom setting."

Dr. Dahlke has been in the Capitol Quartet for almost five years and is thankful for the opportunities and encounters his membership has given him. "I've enjoyed being able to form strong relationships with professors at other universities," he said. "Joining the Capitol Quartet has been wonderful in terms of my professional development and in terms of recruiting students to the university."

Dr. Dahlke noted that a large part of his job at UNC involves teaching classical saxophone. "Most people don't associate a saxophone with the orchestra or classical music," Dr. Dahlke said. "I'm trying to continue to develop the saxophone as a classical instrument."



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