



Providing Unique Experiences Through Partnership Colorado School of Mines at An Evening of Dancing Horses®

Sometimes beneficial experiences come through unusual circumstances and conversations. You can never quite predict what a band director from an engineering school might respond when you ask if they can play live music while horses perform in the arena around them. Dr. Robert 'Bob' Klimek, the Director of Bands for the Colorado School of Mines, replied simply "sure, we can do that." He, in coordination with the Director of Jazz Ensembles Jonathan 'Jon' Cullison, brought various creative ideas to life in the Events Center in January 2020 to help the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) celebrate the 25th Anniversary of An Evening of Dancing Horses®.

Not only did they complete the task, the talented group of students and directors filled the arena with beautiful music complementing the talented equestrian athletes to produce a powerful and captivating event, complete with an opening number with western music hall of fame member Michael Martin Murphey and an organ solo during the *Phantom of the Opera* act.



The students were almost as easy to convince as Bob and Jon to join the production team for this unique event. Zek Kelly, the section leader for French horn, thought the idea "was something new and exciting that not many can say that they have done." Another French horn player, Michael Bayne, concurred "it sounded like a lot of fun and would be a good experience." For many of the students, including Zek and Michael, January 2020 was their very first time attending or participating in the NWSS.



For others like bass trombone drill captain Lauren Drew, attending the NWSS was a family tradition. Her family has been visiting the historic grounds and enjoying their favorite event, bull riding, for over ten years. "I feel that NWSS is a great way for people to experience the culture of ranching and the stock lifestyle that's so common here in Colorado." Even if 2020 wasn't her first 'rodeo', she still left with some cracked teeth thanks to a mishap during rehearsal. She claims that won't deter her attendance in the future and everyone should know they are welcome at NWSS, even if they are a city slicker!

The Mines' percussion section leader, David Henry Churchwell, hails from Texas so is no stranger to rodeo. He had never heard of An Evening of Dancing Horses® but knew their performance band was typically willing to take part in musical opportunities. He is extremely grateful for the opportunity and proud to be a part of the Mines band, "The NWSS allows for Mines students to perform on a large stage for monetary donations, university recognition, and, most importantly, personal enjoyment. Music continues to amaze me as to its reach, influence, and power. Being able to inspire dancing in people, let alone horses, during the show truly struck me as to music's ability to not only mirror culture, but also

ourselves and our relationships.” When asked how he would describe the event, he said, “This event is far more than an entertainment display. Various groups are there to showcase their respective talents which culminates into a true cultural event, rather than an event driven merely by entertainment. Watching it culminate into a wonderful performance that touched many, especially in a leadership position, made me proud of my section and the band as a whole.”



Hannah Wistrand, a junior drum major, comes from the Pacific Northwest so had no familiarity with NWSS but that didn't hinder her excitement to perform. The enormity of the entire event surprised her and she can't wait to be back and experience more of the grounds. “I love telling people about NWSS and my experience as a performer. I was so excited to be able to do something that unique.” She claims her experience is just one reason she appreciates the Mines band and their directors. “We have a habit of saying ‘yes’ to some of the

most extraordinary, surprising opportunities! The partnership between Mines and the NWSS is really a way for Mines to interact with our Denver community and get our name out there as a reliable, talented, fun group of musicians, while providing the NWSS with another attraction for community engagement.” Most of the musicians were not sure what to expect regarding the equestrian performers – and did not meet them until the one scheduled rehearsal - so were surprised by the talent and variety of horses and costumes. “Being able to play music with our friends at such a unique venue is really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. My experience as a performer accompanying the NWSS performances solidified two ideas in my mind. First, that experience is a perfect example of the amazing things that can come out of saying yes to new experiences. Second, I was reminded of just how important staying an adaptable and willing musician is. A lot can go wrong with a performance like this, but as long as we're confident and maybe have a little sense of humor about things, it'll all work out.” She also shared, “one of the greatest things about the NWSS was being able to bond even more [with classmates] over the late-night chaos of performing at a live show like this.”

Lindsay Nunamaker, who plays trumpet, enjoyed the opportunity to show the audience that Mines is not only a school for engineers but one of talented musicians also. She describes the NWSS and her experience as simply “magical and memorable.” Drum major Jeffrey Wilson agreed, stating the partnership has proven to be a wonderful way to create unique experiences for students to grow and improve.



A number of assets set the NWSS apart from other events and the students agree saying the number of people they played in front of and the amount of praise they received for their performance were just a few perks. It was a general consensus that the platform to share the Mines accomplished music program with other Coloradans broadened the program's horizons and reached a different audience than their typical performances.

Bob proudly concludes with the fact that these musicians are also in fact engineers to attend Mines and that, “they typify the ‘polymath’ type of students who can be musicians and engineers at the same time. Instead of being locked into only the ‘nerdy’ type of person, they bring creativity and science together.”

For more information on the Colorado School of Mines Music & Performing Arts program, visit:
<https://hass.mines.edu/undergraduate-programs/>