

My name is Maddox Weckerle-Dietz, and I am a senior at Norfolk Senior High School. I am the President of the Speech Team and a student journalist for the Norfolk Daily News. I am also the President of National Honors Society and Junior State of America, a student civic education and engagement club. In my spare time, I like to read, write, and spend time with my friends and family.

I will write monthly articles highlighting student life at Norfolk Senior High School. Many exciting things occur every day at the high school, and I hope to give you a glimpse into these moments in my upcoming articles. Here is my first article:

Norfolk High School Orchestra Concert Was “A Celebration”

October 2021

Last week, Norfolkans eagerly ushered into the Johnny Carson Theater for the 2021 Norfolk High School Fall Orchestra Concert. As friends and families seated themselves in the theater, orchestra students buzzed backstage. Mrs. Denise Bender, the Norfolk High School Orchestra Director, watched as the students excitedly chatted and tuned their instruments.

“This is my favorite aspect of teaching orchestra—being able to help so many students find joy in rehearsing, playing, and performing music,” Mrs. Bender said. “Music brings people together in a way that nothing else can.”



Norfolk High School orchestra students rehearse music prior to the concert. (Photo Credits: Layla Buchanan)

As the last audience members trickled into the theater, the orchestra students filed onto the stage. Then, the music began. The orchestra opened with the light and classical “First Movement of Symphony No. 5” composed by Franz Schubert and arranged by Brian Holmes. Then, the members played “The Eastern Shore” by John Mock, a lyrical piece with moving melodies. These songs were followed by “Green Rhythmico” by Kirt Mosier, which featured lively solos by numerous members of the orchestra. Cello soloist Daniel Weitzmann spoke about his solo preparation.

“I wasn’t nervous for my solo because of all the rehearsal we do in class. Practicing on my own at home has helped as well, but I have to give the greatest appreciation to Mrs. Bender, who makes sure that everyone is fully prepared for each performance,” Weitzmann said.

Following the first three songs, the senior orchestra students and their parents were recognized in a senior recognition ceremony. For many seniors, the ceremony provided time to reflect on their years in orchestra. Pareena Ponniah, the first-chair viola player in the orchestra, felt bittersweet: “I still cannot believe I am a senior. I enjoy playing music, [and] I have grown close to so many of my friends through orchestra. I feel sad knowing that this is my last year playing for Mrs. Bender,” Ponniah said.



Mrs. Bender leads the Norfolk High School Orchestra in rehearsal. (Photo Credits: Layla Buchanan)

For Mrs. Bender, the recognition ceremony provided an opportunity to celebrate her orchestra students, including her son, Jacob Bender.

“Even though this [ceremony] is at the beginning of the school year, and we have other concerts to prepare for, it is always emotional for me, as I have seen these students grow so much through the years,”

Mrs. Bender said. “This year will be especially difficult for me as my youngest son is a senior. It is hard to imagine not having my own child in one of my orchestra classes.”

Following the recognition ceremony, the orchestra played “Meer Winden” by Bob Phillips, a spirited piece with an energetic beat. The orchestra ended the concert with “Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides” composed by Hans Zimmer and arranged by James Kazik, which featured a variety of percussion instruments. As the final note rang in the Johnny Carson Theater, the audience rose to applause.

After the concert, orchestra students and their family and friends filed out of the theater with smiling faces. “This concert was a celebration,” Mrs. Bender said. “It truly demonstrated the power of music to bring people together!”