

Bartels Pens "Suite 2020"

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BARTELS PENS "SUITE 2020"

Joseph Bartels' ('20) musical composition "Suite 2020" had its debut performance by Dordt University's Chamber Orchestra during the Fall Festival of Music last October.

Bartels says "Suite 2020" is a response to a time of change and painful transition in his life during 2020.

Last year, Bartels felt pretty certain about his future. He had completed his worship arts degree in December 2019 and accepted a position as worship arts director for Orland Park Christian Reformed Church in Illinois. His wife, Katie (Bousema, '20), had found work as a fourth-grade teacher at Southwest Chicago Christian Schools. After Katie completed her student teaching in Sioux Center, the couple would head to the Chicago suburbs. In the meantime, Bartels was working full-time at the Fruited Plain Café in Sioux Center.



J. Bartels

Then Covid-19 hit. Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds mandated that restaurants could only serve takeout, so the Fruited Plain became deserted. At first the changes seemed a little exciting to Bartels, but as the weeks dragged on, the uncertainty felt unnerving, and a sadness settled in. Dordt's class of 2020 commencement ceremony was moved online, which meant he couldn't say goodbye in-person to many of his friends. In mid-May, he and Katie packed up their belongings and moved to Chicago—leaving behind his childhood home of Sioux Center, his friends and family, and all that he knew. Then, his grandfather, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy Dr. John Kok, passed away—and Bartels wasn't able to be with his grandfather during his final hours.

The result of these experiences inspired "Suite 2020," an orchestral compilation in three parts. He describes the first



Despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Dordt's music faculty and students have found ways to practice and perform live.

movement as slow and expressive—a time to pause and notice how impermanent everyday life is.

"The second movement has a steadier tempo and is more driving. It's a reminder that, even with huge changes, life goes on; people are born and die. And then the third movement is more redemptive—that even in the pain of change, there is evident redemption," says Bartels.

A talented musician, Bartels says he chose to write an orchestral piece that would "make simple music become very human." He had played viola in Dordt's wind symphony for four years, making him familiar with how string instruments and orchestral ensembles work.

At one point in the writing process, Bartels knew he needed feedback. So he turned to Professor of Music Dr. Onsbly Rose.

"I thought, 'This is really nice,'" says Rose. "At the time, I was choosing the musical programming for the 2020-21 academic year, and I remember thinking that it would be awesome to include a piece written by a Dordt alumnus. So, I told Joseph, 'Do you think you could have

this finished by late August, when my students start rehearsing?'"

Five months later, Bartels sat in the B.J. Haan Auditorium with his family, waiting to hear Dordt's chamber orchestra play "Suite 2020" as part of the Fall Music Festival.

"There were so many talented musicians playing my music and to hear it performed in person was great," says Bartels.

"Writing music is a tremendous amount of work. You have to really work at it, and I believe that's exactly what Joseph did," says Rose.

Bartels is thankful for Rose's guidance on "Suite 2020" and for the chance to see his orchestral compilation performed live in his hometown in front of his friends and family.

"I'd only known Dr. Rose for one year, but I knew I could talk with him about music and get his feedback on my piece. He's a good representation of Dordt professors. A lot of people say that the community is what sets Dordt apart from other schools, but I really think it's the professors," says Bartels. "Dordt professors have a humility despite their greatness—they're approachable, and they want to help you."

SARAH MOSS ('10)



WATCH AND LISTEN

To listen to "Suite 2020" played by Dordt's chamber orchestra, visit [youtube.com/watch?v=6wXJGbrIRMA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wXJGbrIRMA).

