

# THE DALTONIAN

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## NEWS

# Discovering Dalton's Music Department

MARCH 14, 2025 BY MIKA HIGGINS-WOO

Have you always wanted to learn the history of pop but never knew where to start? Have you forever yearned to learn how to read music but never got around to it? Do you have a passion

for a musical instrument and want to continue to play in a formal environment? If your answer to these questions is yes, you may be interested in enrolling in a Dalton music course.

Music has been a core part of Dalton since its inception (1919) when Helen Parkhurst proposed the Dalton Plan. According to the Dalton website, Parkhurst saw the arts, including music, as “opportunities for self-expression and communication at different levels of... sophistication.” To take a deep dive into this critical aspect of Dalton's history and curriculum, *The Daltonian* sat down with the co-chairs of the music department, Elizabeth Cruz and Bill Solomon.

Cruz has worked at Dalton for “quite a long time.” She began working part-time and only with the young middle schoolers. She soon switched to full-time, “adding seventh [grade], eighth [grade], and then high school.” She stepped into the position of co-chair five years ago. Solomon's history with the Dalton music department is similar to Cruz's: “I've been here for seven years. Like Cruz, I started part-time and then became full-time.”

Solomon has a Doctor of Musical Arts in percussion, and Cruz has extensive background in music education, having gotten her degree in music and then working as an educator and performer all around the world before coming to Dalton. Given their extensive experience in music, both teachers have a deep passion for their art and a commitment to educating. The department also consists of 4 other teachers: Jordan Brown, Glenn Makos, David Morgan and Ya-Chin Pan. Dalton students are lucky to have teachers who each specialize in the particular area of music they teach; an expert always teaches our classes, whether their focus is on jazz, strings, or winds.

Solomon opened the interview by stating the importance of this department at Dalton: “Music has always been a really important part of the Dalton curriculum. So I think it was there from day one. Music was always in the curriculum. Choirs and an orchestra, different ensembles throughout the years, and things have changed. But it's been a through line throughout all of Dalton's history.”

Dalton offers many music courses to its students. Some, such as the high school Chorus, which sings at every Candlelighting ceremony, and the jazz, wind, and percussion ensembles,

are what the department calls the “ensemble performance classes.” They are the most well-known by students, possibly because many have been part of an ensemble themselves in middle school. For this reason, these performance classes, according to Solomon, are “the most popular and well-attended” of the department.

There are other music classes at Dalton, but they are lesser known. This is likely because they do not include performances but are classroom-based and focused solely on learning about music. These classes include Music Theory, Music History, Composition and Music Tech. Solomon reports that these non-performance-based classes “are the hardest to get students enrolled in...those are classes that we’re always redeveloping [so] students can...find things that are interesting [to them].” Cruz agrees, adding that in redeveloping these classes, the music department is “trying to reach not only students who love performing but also those who have a love and interest in music who don’t like that performance piece.”

To get a student perspective on one of these classes, *The Daltonian* reached out to Sydney Shaw ('27), a current member of Music Tech. Shaw spoke passionately about this class, exclaiming that she enjoys the class because it enables her to “create my own unique music without having to learn an instrument, as well as encouraging me to learn more about music composition.” Shaw then reflected that she wished that there were more people in the class and that she “feel[s] like [she’s] already met some cool people in class and learned a lot,” and that would only be raised to a higher level if there were more people enrolled in the class.

Another opportunity available to students is the senior-only elective, Music Capstone. “Music Capstone is a class that takes sort of humanities skills and combines them with something music-related, and you get students in project planning,” explains Cruz. This class allows students to branch out from any existing curriculum here at Dalton and explore something that interests them. For example, Veda Safranek ('24) did a deep dive into the mechanics of singing heavy metal music last year. Other examples of music capstone projects this year include:

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Because of the top-notch faculty and the meticulous care that goes into designing new courses tailored to students' interests, Cruz and Solomon agree that they would love to see more interest in specific courses. Cruz particularly feels this way about the chorus class she teaches. She mentioned that many students participate in the school musical or audition for Sweet 'N Low (Dalton's acapella group) yet don't enroll in chorus class (maybe choosing to stick to those other performance-based groups instead). She added, "It'd be really nice to, at least for chorus, have a little more of a mix of people that have other interests such as theater or acapella or even something not related to singing but still just love to sing, and this is a place where they can do it."

Increasing general interest in classes like chorus would reward the teachers' hard work in creating these courses. It would also be a fun and rewarding experience for the students. Cruz says, "[Dalton] can be such a stressful environment, and we [the members of the music department] view ourselves as a place where you can really come and enjoy a space where there's a lot less pressure, and you can do something that's really good for you, your health, your wellness, your mental state. Use a different part of your brain." Solomon adds, "and that's for all the arts, for theater or dance. It's just another sort of creative outlet with maybe a lot less stress than, say, a math course maybe or history." Both Cruz and Solomon acknowledged that joining the music department through enrolling in a course is like joining a second house—a new community. Solomon explains, "kind of like being on a team or being in a cast, or a club that you're really involved in, it's just another way that you get to meet students in school. I think music's special."

Cruz and Solomon concluded the interview with a message to students. Cruz encouraged students to provide feedback and engage with the music department, "I would say if there's

something that you would love to see offered here...we'd love to hear from students about what might be missing in their view. What would make a more robust music department or curriculum?" Solomon extends a warm welcome to anyone interested in music: "Everyone did music in middle school that went here. And people tried different things, as they should. That's exciting in middle school, but people are always welcome back. So if you took a break, we're a very welcoming place. You can come back in. You don't have to be the best. You don't have to be perfect. But if you want to do it, then music classes are a great place for you."

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