



VIOLIN WHIZ KID PICKS UP THE STICKS

While the average six-year old was singing off-key Christmas carols at a school program, North Freshman Walter Bircher was playing a trio in the Omaha Symphony's Christmas Concert.

While the average 13-year old band plays in a dingy basement, Walter Bircher's band plays in actually notable venues, with some of the biggest bands in the area.

While the average high-school freshman enters Beginning Orchestra in a third or fourth chair position, Walter Bircher entered Honors Orchestra as concertmaster, or first chair violin.

Fiddlin'

"The violin has gotten me more and more involved in music. It's a vicious cycle," North freshman Walter Bircher said.

His parents, both members of the Omaha Symphony, inspired Bircher's early interest in music.

"One day when I was four, I went to see my mom," Bircher said. "She was, like a good musician, practicing her instrument. I went to her and said, 'I want something to practice,' and a little while later, the whole music thing began."

"I really wanted to play saxophone, but my dad told me, and I quote, 'There are no more saxophones. They're all gone, just like the dinosaurs.' So I started on a 1/16 size violin," Bircher said.

This tiny violin was 14 1/2 inches long and 4 3/4 inches wide.

Through the strict practice schedule of his parents and his own personal devotion, he is now member of the Omaha Area Youth Orchestra, North concertmaster, lead singer of the rock band "The Watch" and an asset to North's Explosion! Show Choir band. As a drummer.

Drummin'

Bircher's second band, The Watch, depends on him for both drums and main vocals.

His first drum set at age 13 composed of a 1958 Ludwig bass drum in terrible condition, an assortment of old cymbals and a "crappy" snare.

"This was hardly worth the title of a drum set, but nevertheless, I played. I knew nothing about drumming, but I just sat down, got some toothbrushes because nobody in the hood had sticks, and started whacking away," Bircher said.

"I started singing then too. You can't have a successful band, successful with the ladies of course, without a singer, so I started attempting to sing. Learning to sing and play the drums at the same time was pretty tough, but after a few months I really got the hang of both"

The band members include Bircher and Omaha Central students Carl Miller and Jake Phillips. The trio met when they were each taken to a Neighborhood Watch meeting by their parents. When they decided to form a band, they remembered their roots and they named themselves The Watch. The group even uses the orange criminal figure on the Neighborhood Watch stickers as their logo.

The Watch has performed in such venues as The Rock in Papillion, Hot Shops downtown and The Musicplex. They have performed with such notables as The Side Effects, who made the 2006 Omaha Entertainment Awards alongside Bright Eyes, and A Static Lullaby, who is soon to play with The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus in the Take Action Tour.

Stephanie Valentine

by

editor at large

Explodin'

"Walter can actually read drum set scores, which very, very few drummers can do," Joe Manley, Explosion! director, said.

Drum set scores are the complicated sheet music for drummers, with separate lines for each drum or cymbal.

Bircher enjoys his time in the show choir band for the music, but also, self-admittedly, for the girls.

"I'm in the band, but not in the class, which really makes it fun. It gets me in with lots of girls without the class time," Bircher said.

"Because Walter is available," Manley said, "I have a better selection of songs to perform in the next few years. From country fiddlin' to string quartet accompaniment to singing in the choir, I know he's eager to do whatever I need."

Manley looks forward to soon performing The Beatles' hit "Yesterday" in its original score, which was composed for a string quartet.

"Drumming is definitely my favorite to play. It's loud, fast paced, free form, and I don't have to think about intonation (pitch) at all," Bircher said.

"It really lets me show off my creativity and demonstrate my passion and love for music. I must say though, I'm a much better violinist than a drummer."

THE WATCH

