

Paul Droste

Biography

Dr. Paul Droste was director of the Ohio State University Marching Band from 1970 to 1983. Prior to leading the TBDBITL (The Best Damn Band In The Land) he was the orchestra director at Lakewood High School from 1964 to 1966 and taught string instruments at Lakewood's ten elementary schools during the same period.

Droste was born at Lakewood Hospital on October 14, 1936. As a young child, Droste recalls that his family lived above the Daniels Funeral Home on Detroit Avenue (near Summit Avenue). At age three, the family moved to Fairview Park where he attended school. Droste credits his band and choir director at Fairview, Frank Barr, with steering him towards Ohio State. As Droste puts it, "he asked me what I intended to do and when I told him I'd like to be a high school band director, it was the end of the story...well then, you're going to Ohio State, he said."

Droste also credits Max Denmark "a darn good teacher," who lived at 1612 Winton, for his musical prowess. Droste studied trombone and baritone at Denmark's home each Saturday morning for many years.

Dr. Droste holds a Bachelor of Science in Education from Ohio State, a Masters Degree in Music from the Eastman School of Music and a Doctorate in Music Arts in Euphonium Performance from Arizona University.

Droste, until the recent appointment of Dr. Jon Waters, was the first and only former member of the Ohio State band to later become the band's director. Droste is credited for many innovations including the band's first female members and the inclusion of "Hang on Sloopy" in the band's menu.

In a 2007 interview Droste said, "We were a military band in the 1920s and in the 50s we played Broadway show music and things like that...the first rock

tune we played was 'Hang on Sloopy.' The band director at the time, Charles Spohn, felt this is what students listened to rather than old military and show business stuff. So in the late 60s we were playing 'Hang on Sloopy' eight, ten, twelve times a game." He adds, "I came in as director in 1970. First of all, 'Hang on Sloopy' has never been my favorite piece of music, to be honest about that. We've got to rein this in or we will kill it by overplaying it. So we would wait until between the third and fourth quarters to play the song." And the Buckeye fans loved it.

Droste confided that he worked hard to honor tradition, yet keep the entertainment fresh.

"If you come to a game and you only get tickets to one football game a year, and the band doesn't do Script Ohio, you go home unhappy. If you have season tickets and the band does Script Ohio every game, you just have to ask, "Can they do anything else? So we've tried to balance the traditional elements with the new elements," he said.

According to Droste, the Ohio State University band began as a Reserve Officer Training Band (ROTC) band. Ohio State and all land grant colleges, as a condition of their charters, were required to provide ROTC training for all male students. The Ohio State band eventually emerged from the all-male ROTC cadet band. Because, according to Droste, only males were allowed in the military, the band was all male for many years. Things changed with the Higher Education Act of 1972 which opened the doors for female band participation. Soon thereafter, The Best Damn Band In the Land (TBDBITL) had its first female members.

After graduation from Ohio State in 1958, Droste eventually made his way to Lakewood. "My first job was at Pickerington, just outside of Columbus. Little Pickerington." After graduate school at O.S.U. and Pickerington, in 1964 Droste secured a position as orchestra director in Lakewood.

“T.R. Evans and Band Director Dick Strang hired me,” Said Droste. In addition it didn’t hurt the former Buckeye that Lakewood High School Principal Mahlon A.Povenmire was also a former 1922 Ohio State University Band member.

“They wanted me to be there as the high school orchestra director and full-time string teacher at ten elementary schools. This was the big situation I was looking for,” continued Droste, “where I went from a high school of upper three grades of maybe 100, to a high school where in the upper three grades were 2,300. That was the difference between Pickerington, one of the smallest high schools in the state, to Lakewood, one of the largest schools.”

And with Lakewood being his birthplace, “I thought, well it’s kind of like going home,” said Droste.

Droste describes the faculty at Lakewood High as being very supportive. Often after a concert there would be a nice note in the message box from a fellow staff member. Droste noted a warm sense of comradeship with the likes of Tony DiBiasio, Emil George, Dick Strang and other Lakewood High teachers.

Several past Lakewood High students stick out in Droste’s mind including David Strang, son of the Lakewood High Band Director. Strang was “a heck of a trumpet player” who furthered his music career at Ohio State as a member of the marching band. Karl Verberka, Droste recalls, was a talented violinist.

After a long day at LHS, two years into his Lakewood job, Droste returned to his mother’s house in Fairview Park to find he got the phone call he’d always been waiting for.

Upon entering the house his mother told him, “Jack Evans at Ohio State called and Charles Spohn called a bit later to say they had a vacancy, and they just wanted to know if you would be interested or not.”

Droste knew he couldn't pass up his dream job working with the Ohio State Marching Band.

"Starting instructor was (at Ohio State) I think \$6,000 as my first salary," he said. "Lakewood was paying a bit more than that. But this was the opportunity to be associated with the marching band, teach brass instruments and get away from strings, which I enjoyed."

"The guy who followed me at Lakewood stayed 25 years. Chances are I would have stayed there that long had Ohio State not called," reflected Droste.

In 1966 he met his wife-to-be, Anne, at Ohio State. They have two children, Diana, a teacher in Westerville and Douglas, band director at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater.