



# TWILIGHT of the GODS

## FACULTY DIRECTOR STRIKES THE RIGHT CHORD

Long before her bands play a single note of a composition, Dr. Erika Svanoe plumbs the depths of the musical score until the piece comes to life in her mind. She enjoys delivering more than standard fare, preferring concert events that make her students feel special.

This fall, Svanoe, in her second year as director of bands at Bemidji State University, led the Wind Ensemble and Symphonic Band in the premiere of "Twilight of the Gods," a multimedia composition that tells a doomsday story of Norse mythology. The piece opens with the "Tree of Life," a universal symbol of man's immortality, and leads the audience through an epic struggle of goodness and evil. The performers played to a standing-room-only audience at Bemidji State's Thompson Recital Hall.

*"To feel a story and stir emotions, using two or more senses, especially sight and sound, can be powerful."*

DR. ERIKA SVANOE

"That was incredibly satisfying for me and my students," Svanoe recalls. "It was nice to have a piece that I could really promote as an event. I'm hoping to continue to do that and build more interest in the University community and what we do here."

For Svanoe, the experience was satisfying on a personal level as well. "Twilight of the Gods" is based on a graphic novel, *Gods of Asgard*, written and illustrated by her husband, Erik Evensen, and self-published in 2007. A lover of Norse mythology, Evensen conceived the idea when he was 13 years old.

The mythology also resonated with the couple's friend, composer Andrew Boysen Jr., a music professor at the University of New Hampshire (UNH), where Svanoe taught from 2003 to 2006 and Evensen graduated in 2001. The three friends are of Norse descent, Danish and Norwegian. In 2009, Boysen suggested using Evensen's illustrations to create a multimedia band composition.

Boysen wrote the music. Evensen, an illustrator and graphic designer, scanned his hand-drawn illustrations onto the computer and enhanced them with digitized color and lighting to create an animation effect. He also worked with Svanoe's student musicians to help convey the mythology's meaning as they prepared the composition.



TWILIGHT OF THE GODS REHEARSAL (FAR LEFT), PEP BAND (ABOVE), AND A SMILE FOR A REALLY GOOD PERFORMANCE.

"I knew that I wanted to work with these two people who I'm close to and who do amazing work, and I wanted to perform the piece here at Bemidji State," Svanoe explains. "It was an interesting piece to bring into this community with its strong Scandinavian heritage."

A commissioning consortium soon formed, with BSU and about 30 other schools paying a fee to have exclusive rights to perform the composition. Svanoe hopes that the piece will be published, making it more widely available. "We took the piece on tour to area high schools, and those high school kids loved it," Svanoe says. "I got e-mails from directors hoping they can perform it."

Svanoe first used visual effects last year. She'd like to do other multimedia

compositions and premiere another opus at BSU. "To feel a story and stir emotions, using two or more senses, especially sight and sound, can be powerful," she says.

A clarinetist, Svanoe first realized she wanted to be a musician in high

school. She composed her own pieces, something she would like to do more frequently, and grew into the idea of being a conductor and teacher.

From Svanoe's perspective, a successful conductor must be a good musician first and then a good communicator. "Conducting is like having a conversation with the musicians, being able to communicate non-verbally through facial expression, gesture, and posture," she notes. "When my students see me light up with a smile – and I don't smile unless it's really good – they know it's genuine."

Before earning her doctorate, Svanoe was the athletic band director at UNH, where she

led the marching and pep bands for three years. This year, she directed the pep band at the BSU hockey games. "We added a collegiate atmosphere at the new Sanford Center, and it was a fun venue for our students," says Svanoe, who also teaches a clarinet studio and music education courses.

As she looks to the future, she hopes to focus more on recruiting instrumentalists and sustaining opportunities for music majors and other students interested in music. Even in tight economic times, Svanoe encourages students who love music to pursue their passions. She points to BSU's excellent placement rate for its music education majors as a viable option for program graduates.

"From what I've seen, anyone who works hard and is willing to put in the time is able to make a living in music," Svanoe observes. "I know I've had some thin years, but at the same time, there's nothing else I'd rather do. If making music makes you happy in life, then that's what you should do." ■



VIDEO ONLINE @ [www.bemidjistate/bsutoday](http://www.bemidjistate/bsutoday)