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Augusta music teacher scores new achievement

By AARON MILLER, Staff Writer

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WINDSOR — Even after 23 years of teaching music in Augusta, Dwight Tibbetts didn't think he could join the ranks of composers.

"I didn't think I was good enough," he said.

Arranging and composing music has been a sideline hobby for the 46-year-old middle school teacher. He never thought his work would someday become published.

That day has come.

While surfing the Internet one day, Tibbetts discovered a California-based company that specializes in publishing brass music. He recently mailed copies and recordings of his music to Richard Wuopio,



DWIGHT TIBBETTS

owner of the Solid Brass Music Co.

"He has some nice arrangements that are not similar to anything else we have in our online catalog," Wuopio said. "They will fill a hole for us that will hopefully sell."

Tibbetts didn't give exclusive rights to Solid Brass Music, so he will receive 20 percent of the profits. He plans to also sell his work to another publisher, which could fetch \$15 to \$40 apiece for each arrangement, he said.

Tibbetts, who arranges music by taking an existing song and converting it into five brass parts, sold Wuopio about 20 pieces of reworked country, classical and rock songs. Their titles include "Rock Around the Clock," "Come Sweet Death," "Tribute to Frank Sinatra" and "Salute to Bob Hope."

Composers Luther Henderson, who wrote for Duke Ellington's band in the 1940s, and Chris Dedrick, known for composing military music, are Tibbetts' major influences.

"I've learned so much by playing their music, and it's paying off," he said. "It's the process, not the product. It's like teaching. It's not the product you put out, it's the process in which you teach them."

Tibbetts, of Windsor, started teaching music in 1980 at Cony High School. He left five years later to rebuild the Augusta School Department's music program by teaching at Buker Middle School — a school that may close as the Augusta Board of Education looks to cut costs.

"Enrollment has dropped at the middle school, but the band enrollment has done nothing but increase over the years," Tibbetts said.

If Buker does close, Tibbetts said, he doesn't know where he will teach next, but he hopes to stay in the Augusta school system. He said he has learned how to capture students and turn them on to music. His secret is making learning fun and giving them an opportunity to give input on the music they play.

"You need to make it their program, not just my program," he said. "There's work involved, but it can be fun. You need to let them believe they can be better than they are."

Tibbetts took his first piano lesson when he was 10 years old and continued until he started college.

"I was hooked as soon as I could climb up on the piano stool," he said. He began writing arrangements when he graduated from Wiscasset High School in 1975, then composed music for recitals while attending college at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, where he earned a degree in music education. He also attended college at the University of Maine at Augusta, where he received an associate's degree in jazz performance. When he graduated UMA in 1977, he received the Willie Maiden Award, an honor that recognizes excellence in arranging.

"I grew up on a farm in Whitefield," he said. "I barely had any training. UMA is wonderful. It gave me a start. I learned as much in hallways as I did in the classroom."

He joined the Manchester Brass and played trumpet for about seven years before starting the Downeast Brass last spring.

"It must be a lonely life being a composer," he said. "They have to set themselves apart from society in order to be creative sometimes."

Although living the life of a recluse is not what Tibbetts had in mind, he does enjoy any spare time to work on his music. His wife Marianne is a music teacher at Hussey and Lincoln elementary schools in Augusta. Together they are raising three children, ages 10, 11 and 13.

"If it wasn't for my wife, I wouldn't have the time to arrange music," he said.

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