

# Banter with the band

## Composer premieres work with New Trier musicians

BY SUSAN BERGER  
STAFF WRITER

All eyes are on Philip Rothman as he stands on the podium, baton in hand. Dressed in khakis and a casual shirt, Rothman, 26, looks about the same age as the New Trier Symphonic Wind Ensemble students he is conducting.

The music, a composition entitled "Battery Park Suite" commissioned by New Trier Director of Bands John Thomson and written by Rothman, begins. Rothman is half-smiling, his body bouncing to the music. His eyebrows raise as he cues the percussion to join in.

"Good, this is really good," he tells the students.

The Symphonic Wind Ensemble rehearsed last week for the debut of "Battery Park Suite" May 2 at Northwestern University's Pick-Staiger Concert Hall in Evanston as part of the Spring Festival of Music Concert.

The students received the "Battery Park Suite," written expressly for New Trier and with focus on percussion, just before Spring Break. Thomson said it is a complicated piece but the students have mastered it well.

"The thing with students," Rothman said, "even if the notes aren't perfect and there can



Philip Rothman, a composer and guest conductor, leads the New Trier Symphonic Wind Ensemble in "Battery Park Suite."

Geoff Scheerer/Pioneer Press

be a few glitches, and the piece may not sound precisely as it was written - what is lacking in expertise, the students make up in enthusiasm, interest and passion in music. Generally they are enthusiastic to work with a real-life composer."

### Commissioned pieces

Thomson, a 22-year New Trier veteran, has commissioned other pieces for his students over the last 10 years. Parents finance the project in a "buy a bar" campaign, whereby donors can buy a measure of the music for \$10. This year's piece cost about \$3,000 including travel expenses for the composer.

Thomson and Rothman began their talks about a commissioned piece about two years ago.

"My goal is to get a composer with his music in front of my ensemble and get out of the way and let the kids experience it," Thomson said.

Rothman, with impressive credentials that include a master of music degree from The Juilliard School, where he received a full scholarship, has a long list of compositions. His music has been heard at major venues, including Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, and he has received numerous awards.

Rothman, a native New Yorker, wrote "Battery Park Suite" after the well-know park

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Geoff Scheerer/Pioneer Press



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Trumpeters play out while rehearsing "Battery Park Suite." The new piece about the park in New York City was commissioned for the New Trier Symphonic Wind Ensemble and directed by the composer.

Members of the New Trier Symphonic Wind Ensemble rehearse last week before premiering a piece commissioned for the high school.



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## ■ The band *Continued from page 29*

in New York City. The piece has a lot of percussion, he said, not as solos, but rather to set the tone and inspire the work as a whole.

The work features a myriad of percussion instruments including bongos, chimes, tom-toms, gongs, tambourines, bells and bongos, he said. The sounds are reminiscent, he said, of what one might find in a park. The wood sounds symbolize a park bench and the metal represents sculptures.

Although the piece was commissioned for New Trier's wind ensemble, Rothman decided to write it with the New York's Battery Park in mind.

"I have never been to New Trier," Rothman said, "I thought it would be false to call it 'New Trier Suite.'"

### Impressive students

Rothman was impressed with the students. Comfortable and cracking jokes during rehearsal, it was obvious he was having fun.

"That should be a B-flat," Rothman said, shaking his head and halting the music.

"I'll have to talk to the composer about that later," he said as the students laughed.

Rothman said the ensemble did very well, considering they were tight on time.

"This is a complicated piece," he said. "And unlike Beethoven's Fifth, of which there are a thousand recordings and everyone knows how it sounds, there is no precedent for this music."

The students clearly liked the experience.

Andrew Hadro, a senior from Glencoe who plays tenor saxophone, said Rothman is "real cool, nice and funny."

"The piece (Battery Park Suite) was fun to play," said Dan Seidman, a senior from Glencoe who plays alto saxophone. "It's upbeat," Seidman said.

Hadro added, "Upbeat, just like him (Rothman)."