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Included below is a press release regarding an upcoming concert at Ferris State University, under the direction of Dr. Scott Cohen, in which associate professor of Music Harry J. Dempsey's "Echoes of a River Town" will be premiered. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

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125th Anniversary Concert to Premiere Original Composition by Ferris Professor

BIG RAPIDS – The combined Ferris State University Symphony Band, Chamber Orchestra and West Central Concert Band, under the direction of Dr. Scott Cohen, will premiere Harry J. Dempsey's "Echoes of a River Town" during their April 21 concert in Ferris State University's G. Mennen Williams Auditorium.

The 8 p.m. performance will be part of a culminating week of activities celebrating Ferris' 125th Anniversary. Other events include Thursday's presidential symposium at 2 p.m. and evening dinner celebration at 6 p.m., and Saturday's choral and jazz concert at 8 p.m., with performances by returning alumni.

Dempsey's "Echoes of a Rivertown" is a three-movement musical pastiche of original melodic ideas written specifically to commemorate the university's 125th anniversary. "I found inspiration for musical ideas by reflecting on historical events from the institution's past in the context of the community in which it was born and flourished," said Dempsey, associate professor of Music.

The first movement of the work is titled "Old Main" and is a musical reflection on the influence of the building that for more than 40 percent of the institution's history was the physical manifestation of the educational values established by Woodbridge Ferris himself.

"This movement attempts to capture Old Main's 56 years of existence," Dempsey, said, adding, "It lit the torch of knowledge for countless students and then the grand old building was literally set to flames in February of 1950 through what was likely arson."

Musical themes will take the listener through the glory days and ultimately the tragic end of Woodbridge Ferris' beloved Victorian-era landmark.

The second movement is entitled "Trestle Bend" and is intended to capture the lumbering background of the Big Rapids area. Themes in this movement reflect the timeless flow of the Muskegon river, which was used as a white pine highway, and the railroads that crossed it giving necessary mobility to the logging industry. River melodies written in 3/4 time

transition to driving 2/4 railroad rhythms clattering over river trestles can be found throughout this movement. It is to this Big Rapids locale and lifestyle that the young idealistic Woodbridge N. Ferris came to start his institute and it is this background that is celebrated in the second movement, Dempsey said.

The concept of total destruction followed by a rebirth of ideals and ideas arising from the ashes is the inspiration for the suite's final movement, "The Phoenix."

"Ferris State University is a phoenix, not in an abstract or theoretical way but in the very literal sense of the word," he said.

After the Old Main fire in 1950, the institute consisted of only smoldering ashes and the waterlogged adjacent Alumni Building. Since the state had not yet taken over the institute, powerful interests in Lansing wanted to give the Ferris monetary allocation, along with its fire insurance payout, to the University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

Instead, Gov. G. Mennen Williams insisted that Ferris would indeed go on and that the state would take over ownership of the institute. From those ashes of Old Main would rise the phoenix we now know as Ferris State University. The third movement of Dempsey's composition musically tracks the rebirth of the institution and the growth that brought it to the world class university that today carries Woodbridge Ferris' name.

"I would imagine that even Woodbridge would be surprised to see what has become of his institute and also to find that the only Michigan university named for an individual is named for him," Dempsey said.

The composition will be the finale of the concert, which is free of charge and open to the public. After the performance everyone also is invited to a reception in the Williams Auditorium lobby.

Read more about Dempsey and his work at <http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/alumni/c&g/spring2006/notes.HTM>.

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Harry Dempsey.jpg

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