

At the Top of His Game

By Kathy Bull, National Communications

Emanating from a first-level suite near home plate at Jacobs Field, home of the Cleveland Indians, just along the third base line, are the sweet sounds from keyboardist Robert Bardwell, music director and organist for the ballpark.

A network administrator for Technical Support Services in Cleveland, Robert's 10 years of piano lessons have really paid off, as he fingers popular melodies on the ballpark's customized, single-tier Ensoniq keyboard to the roar of 40,000 fans.



Robert enjoys his view over home plate at Jacobs Field, from his "office," where he receives the occasional visitor from two doors down at the E&Y suite.

The keyboard is equipped with sound effects, such as trumpet, strings, and piano, and the organ sound Robert uses is stored in the keyboard using a floppy diskette. Robert's natural aptitude for computers comes in handy in operating and maintaining the computer that runs a majority of the in-house audio, which includes between 2,000 and 3,000 prerecorded tunes used when Robert is not available to play.

Robert's opportunity to put his combined talents to use came about through the help of Karyn Steele, an instructional designer for Intellinex. A friend in the music program at Robert's church, Karyn also knows the director of game production for the Indians. Like the team's other "players," Robert had to try out for the job. "They walked me over to the scoreboard room and asked me to play 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame' and some charges, and I botched them," Robert says. He's evidently being modest, because he's now in his second season playing at Jacobs Field.

Up to the challenges

Despite the apparent glamour of Robert's position, the job is not without its challenges, including finding currently popular songs that sound good on the organ. "The only thing I really worry about messing up is the seventh-inning stretch," Robert quips, "because most people can recognize a mistake in 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame.'"

Robert often takes requests of popular songs from co-workers and other friends, as well as Indians players who want specific "batter music" when they're at the plate. He also has to make sure none of the tunes he chooses duplicate music being run along with videos on the JumboTron video board. And there's the occasional fly ball against the glass of the suite he shares with the PA announcer and a sound engineer.

With his work at E&Y in addition to taking classes toward a communications major at Cleveland State University, work-life balance can sometimes be a challenge for Robert. He says prioritizing is the key, but his work for the Indians is something he takes in stride. "It's nice to just sit back and relax and enjoy the game," he says. "I'm not really working that hard."

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