Mathias Dickhut

1954-2020

Music Director

Mathias Dickhut passed away on March 26, 2020, at the age of 66. He was a teacher, high-school coordinator, principal, local politician, but most of all a musician.

A native of Hilders, Germany, Mr. Dickhut graduated from Stein-Gymnasium in Fulda. He first taught at the Ricada Huch-Gymnasium in Dreieich, Südhessen and studied music and conducting in Frankfurt, Berlin and Eugene, Oregon. Among his mentors were world-renowned conductors like Helmut Rilling (Frankfurt), Martin Behrmann (Berlin) and David Thorson (Eugene). He founded several choirs in his career, including the Frankfurter Vokalisten and the Ricarda-Huch Choir, both of which were recorded and broadcast by major radio networks and received prizes from the British Broadcasting Corporation and Hessischer Rundfunk. Known for his skill as an oratorio conductor, Mr. Dickhut conducted the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, the Mainz Chamber Orchestra, and the Washington Symphony Orchestra, among many others.

For six years (1996-2002), Mathias Dickhut was a music teacher at the German International School Washington, DC, (GISW) and served as high-school coordinator (Oberstufencooridinator) from 1999-2002. During his time at the GISW, he organized numerous performances with the German School choirs: Werkstadtkonzert: Peter Rose’s Ocean World (Jan 29, 1997); Christmas Benefit Concert, Bach’s Weihnachtsoratorium und Weihnachtslieder: In Memory of Karl and Anna Knobloch (at the Lady of Mercy Catholic Church, Potomac, MD, Nov. 30, 1997); Mozart’s Die Entführung aus dem Serail (at the GISW in June 1997) and Die Zauberflöte (at the GISW, June 10, 1999). His Rock Requiem (1999) with songs from the musical Jesus Christ Superstar and the memorable “Sanctus, Sanctus” adapted by Thomas Hettwer received standing ovations.
Aside from the joy and appreciation of music that Mr. Dickhut brought to the German School community, one of his most lasting legacies is inviting Adolfo Sarmiento to sing a series of holiday songs during the school’s Christmas celebration in 1998. To a very responsive audience, Adolfo sang a serious “Ave Maria,” “Little Drummer Boy,” and an upbeat version of “Feliz Navidad.” Adolfo’s performances have become a GISW tradition. For more than two decades, the GISW community counts on Adolfo’s “Feliz Navidad” to set the tone for the holidays.

While at the DSW/GISW from the fall of 1996 until spring of 2002, Mr. Dickhut was also conductor of the Washington Sängerbund. During his time in Washington, he maintained the good relationship between the German School Choirs and the Sängerbund, organizing and conducting joint performances. His farewell concert in May 2002 was Antonin Dvorak's “Mass in D major” at the Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, MD, with the Sängerbund and the Chorus of the German School. Before returning to Germany, the Sängerbund made him an Honorary Member in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the musical quality of the chorus.

Mr. Dickhut released several CD recordings of his concerts, among them Haydn’s Die Jahreszeiten with the combined choirs of the Washington Sängerbund and the German School (at the Washington National Cathedral, 2001); Rossini’s Petite Messe Solennelle, Choir of the German School (2001); Bach’s Weihnachtsoratorium and Christmas Songs, Washington Sängerbund/German School Choirs (Nov. 30, 1997).

After his return to Germany, Mr. Dickhut worked as high-school coordinator at the Winfriedschule in Fulda from 2002 to 2008, and taught at the Ulstertalschule in Hilders. Beginning in 2013, he served as principal at the Winfriedschule for six years, retiring in 2019. The Winfriedschule homepage featured an article about that school’s farewell to their beloved principal: "We were a good team!" said deputy principal Sven Müller at the time. With clear, realistic ideas, Mr. Dickhut led the transformation of the Winfriedschule into its new, contemporary building, making it a place where students feel comfortable, where they can learn, and are valued. As one seventh-grader said: "Our principal wants us to do well."
From 2004, Mathias Dickhut conducted the Gesangverein Hofbieber. Established in 1882 and named after the region around the city of Fulda, the group provided musical venues for the residents of Fulda and its suburbs. For a special concert on October 13, 2010, Mr. Dickhut returned to Washington with the Gesangverein Hofbieber to perform in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington as part of the sixty-ninth season of the William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammet Belin Concerts, complementing an exhibit of German Renaissance paintings at the Gallery. The same group also gave a concert at the United Church in Georgetown.

And since 2016, Mr. Dickhut was also active in local politics and served as chairman of the Hilders municipal council for five years.

Mathias Dickhut succumbed to cancer in 2020. When asked by a reporter of the Osthessen News, an art colleague, Werner Döppner, who was good friends with Mathias, said: "In the end, it was a relief for him. Mathias was such a positive colleague; he always laughed and bore his illness with a discipline that was exemplary."

We mourn the loss of an individual who brought the joy of music to so many and made a real difference in our lives. Our condolences go out to his wife Ute Dickhut and his family.