

# Tyrannosaurus Sue

A letter from Bruce Adolphe

Humans, like you, have the amazing ability to think about the past.

Not only can we think about what we had for dinner last night or recall a concert or sports event from last year, we can even think about things that happened before we were born — or before anyone was born. Like thinking about dinosaurs.

Because paleontologists (scientists who study fossils and remains from millions of years ago) can uncover the past for us, we can look at dinosaur bones and think about what life was like 67 million years ago. That's way before smart phones. It's even before umbrellas. In fact, it is before people existed!

In the year 2000, the most complete set of dinosaur bones ever discovered was put on display at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. The bones belonged to a *Tyrannosaurus rex* that weighed about seven tons (when alive), and it had 60 teeth, some as long as 12 inches. Because the *T. rex* was discovered by a paleontologist named Sue Hendrickson, we call the dinosaur Sue. Its official name is FMNH PR 2081. "Sue" is catchier, I think you will agree.

When "Sue" was put on display for the first time, the Chicago Chamber Musicians were invited to play a concert in the museum to celebrate the day, and they asked me to compose them a piece about the dinosaur. That's why we have the piece *Tyrannosaurus Sue*.

If you were writing a piece of music about a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, which one of these instruments would you choose to portray the huge dinosaur: flute; trombone; violin; cello; clarinet. I chose the trombone because it is loud, powerful, and can roar.

I also portrayed some other dinosaurs in the music: the clarinet is a smaller dinosaur called a *Troodon*; the French horn portrays the *Triceratops* (which has three horns); the *Parasaurolophus* is portrayed by the bassoon.

But at the very end of the musical story, we leave the dinosaurs and think about humans. Humans, as I mentioned at the top of this letter, have the ability to think about the past, to imagine what the world may have been 67 million years ago.

To celebrate our imaginations — and also to celebrate science, which enables us to discover the past and invent the future — I chose the violin to be the solo instrument. It has the warmth, flexibility, and sweetness that remind me of humans at their best.