

The Boston Globe

## South

# The Sharon Bands, a pair of wind ensembles, celebrates 25 years

By **Jennette Barnes** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT    FEBRUARY 07, 2013



ROSE LINCOLN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Clarinetist Paul Olson of East Providence rehearsed with the Sharon Concert Band at Sharon Middle School.**

SHARON — In 1988, an idea, a conductor, and a handful of brave musicians founded a community band.

What started small has grown and flourished, and this year, the Sharon Bands — now

a pair of ensembles that includes a jazz band — are celebrating the 25th anniversary of their original ensemble. In the years since the group’s founding under the auspices of the town Recreation Department, it has expanded from a few musicians to approximately 60.

It has also grown in its musicianship, evolving into what conductor and music director Steve Bell says is a wind ensemble with a challenging, refined repertoire, “representative of what you would call a symphony orchestra.” Although most are not professional musicians, many could be, according to Bell, now in his sixth year with the group. Many are longtime members, and a handful performed in the first concert all those years ago.

The concert band’s songbook ranges from the patriotic melodies and show tunes of open-air summer concerts, to classical, to traditional Celtic. The smaller jazz band, known as the Roy Scott Big Band, plays everything from swing-era classics to jazz, blues, Latin, and more, and hosts dinner-dances that attract serious swing dancers and social dancers alike.

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▼

Michael Getz, who plays clarinet in the concert band and tenor saxophone in the big band, first heard about the group more than 20 years ago, at a social event for newcomers to Sharon. At the time, “I was rusty,” he said. He hadn’t dusted off his instruments in at least five years, maybe 10.

### Related

- **Two bands in one**
- **Sharon Bands upcoming concerts**

But he gave it a try. He didn’t audition, as the bands don’t hold formal auditions, but they do expect a certain level of performance, members said.

For Getz, the group just clicked. He loves the fun, funky music of the big band, as well as the joyful summer concerts that have taken the group to at least 25 area towns, he said.

At one time, most of the musicians were Sharon residents, but now, many come from other communities, something Getz attributed to the skill of successive music directors in pushing the bands to improve and attract new musicians. He said the group's credits include gigs at Boston's Hatch Shell and Faneuil Hall.

"A band like this in a community is just really a jewel," he said.

Members are proud of the group's history of helping teenage musicians develop their skills. One former Sharon student, Ellis Tucker, recently graduated from the Berklee College of Music and works in Boston as an independent music producer, guitarist, and artist relations manager.

Among the current young musicians is Kristine Dunham, a senior at Bridgewater-Raynham Regional High School, whose father and sister once played in the band as well.

"It's kind of like a family affair f

or me," she said. "We're all here because we enjoy playing music."

Laurel Hentschel, 33, plays percussion, and she loves the timpani, which are broad kettle drums played with mallets. She played at Rockland High School, but after graduation, didn't pick up the mallets for a decade. Then, a few years ago, she moved to Sharon and saw information about the Sharon Bands online.

She missed playing, so she joined the group, and she feels at home, especially under the direction of Bell, her former director at Rockland High.

"I love the atmosphere. Everyone is so friendly and welcoming," she said.



ROSE LINCOLN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Trumpeter Joy Oakes of Quincy, (center) is part of the Sharon Concert Band.**

At a rehearsal in late November, the concert band did its first run-through of songs for a Celtic concert coming up on March 16. They played “The Irish Washerwoman,” “The Rakes of Mallow,” “A Scottish Portrait,” and “Along an English Countryside,” among others. At the show, some of the songs will feature guest dancers. The band likes to incorporate extra elements into its concerts, such as dancers and vocalists, and many of the shows offer a dinner option.

On Saturday, the Roy Scott Big Band is hosting “Jazzy Valentine,” a dinner-dance at Lake Pearl Luciano’s in Wrentham. The evening starts with a sold-out three-course dinner, followed by music and dancing, with introductory dance lessons by Savaria Dance Studio of Norwood. The band will play swing-era hits, including a tribute to swing great Benny Goodman. Details are posted on the group’s website at [www.sharonbands.org](http://www.sharonbands.org).

The band first got started when David I. Clifton, then parks and recreation director in Sharon, decided a community band would be a good way to bring residents together and complement the local art association and community chorus.

Roy Scott, a jazz pianist who volunteered in the music program at the Sharon public schools, heard about the idea and went to Clifton with a proposal. He would conduct the band, and his wife, Irene Scott, would do the administrative duties.

“He was an inspiration and the guy who really put all the pieces together,” Clifton said.

They advertised in a local newspaper. The first two musicians to sign up played piccolo and trumpet, Clifton said. Initially, they didn’t get enough response, but they advertised again, and a few more joined. Soon, the group was able to start rehearsing.

Scott has since passed away, but his wife, who is in her 90s, still remembers the early



ROSE LINCOLN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Percussionist Laurel Hentschel of Sharon (on left) got a hug from conductor Steve Bell of Middleborough.**

days. Speaking from her home in Florida, she said she was pleased to hear the band was thriving.

“It was really wonderful,” she said, for the band to give concerts in surrounding towns and bring joy to the audience and musicians alike. “It gave them the feeling that they could get enjoyment playing an instrument, and it didn’t cost them anything.”

One of the first musicians in the group was June Blumenthal, who lives in Sharon. Lured by the promise that she need not audition, she hauled out the trombone she hadn’t played since high school and jumped right in. She was nervous, but Scott was wonderful, “always upbeat,” she said. Over the years, the level of play has improved, and the group is more cohesive, she said. Some members, including the trombone players, have sectional rehearsals outside the regular schedule.

Fellow trombonist Mark Freitas of Walpole has played with the bands for about 19 years. His story is typical; he slowly let go of his instrument after college, but picked it up again when he heard about the bands. “As an adult, it’s difficult to find places where you can make quality instrumental music,” he said.

Today, Freitas is a member of the board of directors. Keeping the quality of performance high and the atmosphere inclusive can be a difficult balancing act, he said, but the bands do their best to pull it off. When he first joined, he said, he didn’t really have to practice, but now, “we play music that, man, if I don’t come home and work on it, I can’t hold up my end in the group.”

Bell takes seriously the challenge to raise musicianship continually, and he believes the term “community band” sells his group short. Their vocations may lie in other fields — as business owners, administrative assistants, information technologists, and more — but the members can still unite to make good music, he said.

With the bands now going strong, some sections are full, but Bell would love to have more bass clarinets, tubas, French horns, percussion, and double-reeded instruments.

In recent years, Freitas said, the bands have “kind of reached the pinnacle” of performance. He hopes the future is bright — that despite the challenges of drawing

audiences to a wind ensemble, the Sharon Bands can continue to make their music and uphold the legacy of the last 25 years.

Get two weeks of FREE unlimited access to BostonGlobe.com. No credit card required.

*Jennette Barnes can be reached at [jennettebarnes@yahoo.com](mailto:jennettebarnes@yahoo.com).*

© 2013 THE NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY