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Celebrating the holidays with the Sharon Bands



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Music Director Steve Bell (right), leads the Roy Scott Big Band in some traditional holiday songs and jazz favorites during the Dec. 7 holiday concert at the Sharon Middle School. Wicked Local Photo/Sean Browne



By Jacquelyn Gentile
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Posted Dec. 11, 2014 @ 10:48 am

SHARON

Kicking off their 27th season, the Sharon Bands, consisting of the Roy Scott Big Band and Sharon Concert Band, celebrated the holiday season with a concert at Sharon Middle School.

The 22-member Big Band led the evening on Dec. 7 with holiday favorite "Winter Wonderland"

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before introducing their vocalist Ruth Debrot "Santa Baby." Debrot's strong, sultry vocals fit the bill perfectly, right down to the last anticipatory request for Santa to "hurry...tonight."

The band then jumped into the first of four swingin' classics, "Cry Me a River." Again, Debrot's voice wowed the crowd, prompting whoops and hollers before the band inspired audience toe-tapping to "Johnny Come Lately," a new tune for the group. With plunger mutes on the trumpets, a flute solo and two sax solos, the song started big and ended with the thump of big band drums.

"Another Great Day" started simply enough with a bass line and drum beat, then guitar and keyboard, and finally the whole band. A baritone sax solo rounded out the Mark Taylor tune well.

The band then ventured back into the holidays with an arrangement of "Carol of the Bells" that conductor Steve Bell said might sound out of tune.

"But I would never let them get away with that, however," he said of the band.

The rendition has intentional "mis-notes" to create tension, starting off with echoes throughout instrument sections of the familiar melody. Ray Fucillo turned in a rocking, soothing alto sax solo as the band played on. The rendition was all at once lulling and powerful while distinctly jazz and swing.

Dubrot returned for a sassy "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" as she compared tomatoes and "tomahtoes."

She then sang and swayed to Lee Mendelson and Vince Guaraldi's "Christmas Time is Here," made famous by Charles Schulz's "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

The band then embarked on a playful, instrumental version of "Baby, It's Cold Outside," featuring a trumpet and sax solo.

The group finished their set with "Feliz Navidad," with clicking on the drums, big harmonies and tight playing. The smooth rendition got a big reaction from the crowd before intermission.

The Sharon Concert Band, also directed by Bell, opened their set in a big way with John Wasson's "Festival Fanfare for Christmas," picking right up where the Roy Scott Big Band left off.

The 55-member ensemble then performed John Rutter's "Candlelight Carol," followed by a triple shot of Mannheim Steamroller.

The rock-n-roll set consisted of "Pat-a-Pan," "Carol of the Bells," and the sleeper crowd-pleaser, "Good King Wenceslas," a very cool rendition with a thumping bass line and tambourine. "Carol" was a true rock arrangement with a powerful bass riff and big horns, while "Pat-a-Pan" made perfect, rhythmic use of its on-point percussion section.

James L. Hosay's "A Celtic Christmas" proved a great fanfare of familiar Christmas carols...with a brogue. The piece included flute trills on "Deck the Halls," a prominent piccolo on "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," and a sweet flute and clarinet pairing on "Away in a Manger." The jolly "Here We Come A-Wassailing" and proud march of "He is Born" roused until the last. One audience member couldn't help but shout, "Yeah!" in excitement at the end of the piece. The medley was executed beautifully and was one of the band's finest pieces, if not the one, of the night.

The group ended the night with "On This Day" and "Sleigh Ride," a spirited romp through the (thankfully) metaphoric winter wonderland of earlier. With one of the clarinet players and a tympani player wearing red Santa hats, it was clear that the musicians are set for the season. Their enthusiasm was infectious through their music and not one crowd member left with a pout.

They'd better not.

For information on the Sharon Bands and their upcoming schedule, visit sharonbands.org.

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