

Weekly Band Concerts Thing Of Past In Most Communities--Not Plymouth

There was a time, perhaps a generation back, when most every city and town in Michigan had a weekly band concert during the summer months in the central park or bandstand in the heart of the business district.

It was the high spot of the week's activities and gave all in the area a chance to meet, socialize, eat popcorn and peanuts and ice cream, and enjoy the martial tunes of the volunteer bandsmen.

The tunes may not have been the best, but they were the best for the musicians who were playing because they loved it. There wasn't any pay, one weekly practice and then the concert, generally on Thursday or Friday night.

Then came the automobile, better roads, and the band gradually faded out of existence, principally because the volunteer

musicians had other things to do and the audiences became smaller and smaller.

At about the time community bands were fading in most places, such an organization was revived in the City of Plymouth — and the Plymouth Community band will play the first concert of its 10th season Thursday night in Kellogg Park starting at 8 p.m.

The opening concert features Plymouth's own Sharon Sprague playing a piccolo solo with the band, "Concert in C Major" by Vivaldi.

The program opens with an old familiar John Philip Sousa march, "Stars and Stripes Forever."

The remainder includes: "National Emblem" march, "La Comparsa Carnival Procession," "The Royal Welsh Fusiliers" by Sousa, "On The Square," highlights from

"HMS Pinafore," "Bethsheba," "Trombone Blues," "Robinson's Grand Entree March," and closes with "On The Mall."

Just as the bands of the past were made up of volunteer musicians, so is the Plymouth group. The bandsmen, all playing because they want to keep in the swing of things, practice on Wednesday evenings in the bandroom at Plymouth High School.

The practice facilities are furnished by the Plymouth Community Board of Education, and when the thermometer soars into the high 90s, the neighbors can hear the tunes — the group moves outdoors under the direction of Conductor James Griffith.

Matter of fact, it was principally through the efforts of Griffith, who was in his first years as PHS band director, that the concerts were first started 10 years ago.

GRIFFITH STARTED with members of his own high school group and then invited any others who desired to play to report for the practices. Much to his amazement, the musicians came from as far as 40 miles away to get a chance to "leave off some steam" and keep their lips and wind in top shape.

The musicians reported with their trombones, drums, cornets, clarinets, bassoons, flutes, french horns and every type of instrument needed for a band.

Some were members of Plymouth High bands of past years, some were musicians with other high school bands in the surrounding area, and some came from as far away as New Hudson, Ann Arbor, Flat Rock and Grosse Pointe to play in the concerts.

They don't have any fancy uniforms. Most come attired in white shirts and dark trousers and the feminine members in white blouses with dark skirts or slacks. The concerts aren't one bit formal — the crowd gathers early around the portable bandstand, dragging park benches or bringing their own camp stools and chairs.

The crowd may not be large for the opening number, but once the first tunes are heard — and they can be for blocks around the downtown — then the kiddies and their parents start streaming in from all directions. It's concert night, and they all come to take advantage of the outdoor music which continues over a period of six weeks.

There was a time when the City Fathers contributed to a fund to sustain the band and concerts, but then came a disagreement, and the financial support was dropped.

For a time, it appeared as if the Plymouth Community Band would disappear from the scene as others had in most every section of the state.

THAT'S WHEN THE PLYMOUTH Community Federal Credit Union came to the rescue. Manager and Treasurer George Lawton was told of the difficulties and was instrumental in getting permission of his board to make an annual contribution of \$1,200.

Over the years, it is the Credit Union support that has kept the band and the weekly summer concerts going.

The only paid member of the group is Director Griffith; all others donate their time and services.

The bandsmen come from all walks of life. There are doctors, engineers, accountants, nurses, housewives, teachers, electricians, professional musicians and students from the Plymouth High marching band.

They participate in the activities during the annual Fall Festival, march in the July 4 parade and present two winter concerts. Proceeds of the latter are used to finance the activities of the band and for four half-scholarships to summer music camps.

In addition, the group has presented joint concerts with bands from Belleville and Farmington and the Ford Chorus. It has presented concerts at St. Francis Boys Home in Detroit and Northville State Hospital and programs at the annual Miss Plymouth contest conducted by the Jaycees.

During the Plymouth High football season when Griffith is busy with the PHS band, Keith Burton and Clayton LeRoue share duties in directing the community group.



TRUMPET SECTION sounds off with some sweet music. The quartet includes: (from left)

Steve Weage, Reta Lane, Mrs. Carolyn Weage, all of Plymouth, and Rick Sorenson of Livonia.



OLD, YOUNG HANDS keep in time with the beat. It's typical of the Plymouth Community band



which has youngsters from high school and old-timers who are just keeping busy.



MERRY SOUNDS come out of the tuba when oldtimer John Robinson, of Redford Township, swings into action. It may be work for some but for John this is all pure enjoyment and play.

Pictures By James Hubbard;
Story By R.T. Thompson



PERCUSSION DUO has an intent look. That's Ken Moyer at cymbals and Doug McLeod, of Dearborn, getting ready to beat the big drum.



Conductor James Griffith listens intently



Sharon Sprague features concert with piccolo solo.

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