

## **“HAVE YOU HUGGED YOUR COMMUNITY CONCERT BAND LATELY?”**

The uniqueness of Alaska and the community spirit found in Anchorage is alive and well each Tuesday night from 7-9 PM. That is the time for the Anchorage Community Concert Band's downbeat, which begins another two-hour rehearsal session in preparation for annual concerts conducted during the Christmas and Spring seasons.

The Anchorage Community Concert Band (ACCB) IS in its 21st year as a permanent and uniquely Anchorage institution. This organization of volunteers has consistently provided community service with a rich heritage of concert band music for every musical taste. How is this possible you may ask? The answer is found in the dedication of each member of the ACCB to attend weekly rehearsals and scheduled performances. For many, this is a "family affair" literally with 2 and 3 generations of musicians participating in rehearsals and performing concerts. Currently, this organization has over a dozen original members who have consistently supported ACCB's purpose of providing community service through musical entertainment. Emphasis remains on recruiting adult musicians (auditions are not required) who desire the excitement and teamwork only concert bands can offer.

Bob Armstrong, an educator and music storeowner, formed the Anchorage Community Concert Band in early 1981. Early membership included other music educators, local musicians, and those in the community that played a concert band instrument. At any weekly practice session, the various sections of the band consist of retired professionals, music educators, senior citizens, a scientist, high school students, and others in the community that seek the excitement and satisfaction of musical expression in a concert band venue. Membership has remained voluntary through ACCB's 21-year history. Individual musicians provide their own instrument and pay a modest membership fee to offset the expense of rehearsal hall rental, new music, advertisements, and liability insurance to cover concert performance.

ACCB's current conductor, Neal Haglund, has dominated the community band's baton and conductor position over a third of the organization's 21-year history. As an Anchorage School District band director and educator, he was an original member of the band. As a conductor, he has remained a mainstay of musical leadership and artistic direction in serving Anchorage's educational and musical needs. His artistic talent and highly developed variety of moods and expressions are needed to lead, coax, demand, and romance exceptional performance from a collection of community members. Neal selects a musical repertoire rich in modern and traditional concert band music. Musical variety serves two purposes by challenging community band musicians with musical excellence while also serving the diversity of Anchorage's unique musical taste.

Musical variety and diversity of performance are long-lasting characteristics of the ACCB. Each year, diversity emerges from the rich variety of musical subgroups within the concert band. During the Christmas season, members of the lower brass choir present "Tuba Christmas" presentations which abound with Tuba music. Musical groups

originating from a rich source of musical talent within the band include flute choirs, woodwind quartets, brass choirs, and a Dixieland band. These ensemble groups complimented the concert band's annual performance.

For the holiday season, ACCB's focus is on final preparations for the annual Christmas concert.

The Spring and Fall concerts are fundraising events to sustain the needs of the band, which is governed by an elected board of directors. Other community service concerts have included presentations at the Alaska State Fair, Summer Solstice, Anchorage Psychiatric Institute, Saturday at the Market, and periodic short concerts at selected shopping malls in the Anchorage area.

Back to the original question, "Have Hugged Your Community Band Lately?" The Anchorage Community Concert Band plays an important part in the fabric and complexion of our community. The historical perspective of this concert band (succeeding a rumored Anchorage "Brass Band" in 1914-1915) remains a vibrant and ever changing feature of what it means to be an Alaskan. Through your community support, attendance at ACCB concerts, and donations, you express your attitude towards the arts and our unique musical taste in the Northland. The Anchorage Community Concert Band is your neighbor, friend, work-associate, former teacher, relative, or someone you would like to know. They are all "worthy of a hug" as a reward for their contribution to Anchorage's community service and musical heritage.

*By Vern Watts, a former college musician, joined the ACCB in January 2002 after a 30-year lapse from playing clarinet and saxophone. He is a retired military officer currently completing a Masters degree at UAA in Adult Education.*