

Boulder Concert Band revs up for holiday gala

By Wes Blomster
Saturday, December 8, 2007

IF YOU GO

What Boulder Concert Band holiday concert

When 2 p.m. Dec. 16

Where Boulder High School, 1604 Arapahoe Ave.

Tickets \$3-\$5

Info 303-464-8608

When it was founded in 1870, the Silver Cornet Band wasn't merely the only show of its kind in Boulder; it was respected as the finest organization of its type in the then still-infant state of Colorado.

"It performed weekly concerts, giving the city an opportunity to hear symphonic music long before radio and records," says Randy Coleman, who conducts the successor of this ensemble, the Boulder Concert Band, in a special holiday concert on Dec. 16.

Coleman, in his second season as BCB conductor and music director, traces the history of the organization that now numbers 70 members.

"A larger band was formed in 1897," he says. "And when the Boulder Municipal Band was organized several decades later it was the first that included women musicians."

The current band was a pet project of Hugh McMillen, legendary director of bands at the University of Colorado, who reorganized the ensemble in 1976.

"He was my teacher," says Boulder-born Coleman, who earned both bachelor's and master's degrees at CU before embarking on a teaching career that took him to Southern California for three decades.

He was named director of the BCB when he returned to Boulder to retire.

"The ensemble provides the community with good concert-band music," says Coleman. "And it's a venue for many who played in college bands and want to continue music as a hobby."

Minimum age for members is 18, but high-school students are sometimes admitted to fill vacancies. Seniors, many of them retired professional musicians, contribute to the high level of talent in the organization.

"They like to be challenged," Coleman says of his instrumentalists. "We play some very difficult music, and they complain when they feel I've chosen something that is too easy for them.

"They want something they can bite into."

The BCB plays four major concerts during the regular season; Boulder High is the established venue.

During the summer the band plays eight Monday concerts in major parks in the greater Boulder region.

"Those are free," Coleman says, "but we ask for a donation."

Highlight of the summer is the ensemble's participation in Louisville's Fourth of July celebration.

Dee LeMaster, who has played flute and piccolo in the BCB for almost a decade, is another former McMillen student and — like Coleman — a retired teacher.

"I just retired," she says, "I taught at Boulder High and Casey, and — like Randy — I too was born in Boulder."

She praises Coleman as "easygoing" and "a friend to the musicians."

Tuba player Mike Pinter was a charter member of the ensemble McMillen organized in 1976. Another CU graduate, Pinter taught on the East Coast, in Durango and in Singapore before retiring Boulder.

He speaks enthusiastically of the outreach programs in which the BCB is involved.

"We started an outreach program last year," he says. "Several members of the band visit middle schools in Boulder — along with the conductor.

"The members play along with the students — we act as mentors, while Randy provides a 'clinic' for the students, working on the music that they are performing."

Plans call for expanding this program this season to visit five or six schools — compared to only three last season.

"And we're planning a young artist competition," Pinter says. "The winner will perform with the band at one of its regular concerts.

"We hope to have this in place next year."

Pinter points to the diversity of BCB membership, which includes lawyers, doctors and other professionals.

"It's a wonderful group," he says. "We're there above all for the joy that we have in playing and in giving something to the community."

On next weekend's holiday program Coleman conducts Alfred Reed's "Russian Christmas Music," Steve Reisteter's "Eighth Candle Prayer and Dance for Hanukkah," Matthew Lake's arrangement of "Waltz of the Flowers," from Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" ballet, "Sleigh Bells" by Leroy Anderson, and arrangements of traditional carols.

"Our audience consists largely of friends and family of the players," Coleman says. "It is not large, but we are trying hard to attract more people."

Budget for the year is \$14,500. Members pay an annual fee of \$60, and the band receives a modest amount from the region's Scientific and Cultural Facilities District tax. It also enjoys the support of several donors.

New musicians are always needed, Coleman says, noting that he is currently looking for oboe and bassoon players and percussionists.

Hugh McMillen, director of band at CU from 1936 until his retirement in 1979, died in 1992 at age 79.



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