

New Horizons Band: Better Late Than Never

by Kathy Sanders, *LOL Teamwriter*

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Livin' out loud

You know the expression “It’s never too late?” Well, it turns out to be really true!

That’s the motto of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute’s New Horizons Band of Wilmington, whose members have dusted off their instruments from childhood or have picked up an instrument for the very first time. Some have always played and just want to continue to have the opportunity to pursue their hobby.

And now the public will have the opportunity to hear this hardworking and enthusiastic group of musicians, mostly seniors, when they perform on stage in their upcoming Holiday Concert on Monday, Dec. 12, at 7:30 p.m. at UNCW’s Kenan Auditorium and on Monday, Dec. 5, at 7 p.m. at Independence Mall.

“How many times do you get to see Grandma and Grandpa in concert?” said Dr. John LaCognata, the OLLI New Horizon’s Band director and assistant professor of music and director of bands at UNCW. “What I enjoy most is watching the members interact with their families.”

LaCognata, in his second year directing the New Horizons Band, said members come to rehearsal for the love of playing music.

“It’s unlike anything I’ve ever been a part of,” said LaCognata. “Somewhere in their past they were touched by playing music and this is a great opportunity for them to relive that.”

There are no requirements, no auditions. “It’s not about the level,” he added. “It’s about the progress and having fun.”

Although many of the band members have played in school bands or have had lessons before, some have had no musical experience whatsoever, like Ginny Bacik, who is retired from the UNCW Center for Marine Science and who always wanted to play an instrument, but never had the opportunity.

“I didn’t read music or play an instrument or anything,” Bacik said. She’s been playing the clarinet in the band for three years, learning from a book for middle-school students.

“I love it,” she said. “It has opened up a new world for

me!” Bacik said she tries to practice every day, and also practices weekly with the band’s clarinet section and attends the full-band rehearsals every Monday night.

The OLLI New Horizons Band, in conjunction with the UNCW Department of Music, is a member of the New Horizons International Music Association, first begun at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., to fill a “need for adults to make music, no matter what their experience level.” There are more than 250 New Horizons bands throughout the United States. The philosophy of the program is that “every person has musical potential that can be developed to a level that will be personally rewarding.”

For many of Wilmington’s band members, it’s an exciting opportunity to resurrect their instruments, which have been sitting in the closet for many years.

For Dr. Michael Plaut, a psychologist who retired to Wilmington, it meant being able to pick up his musical training from long ago. He played way back in the 5th grade, then switched to oboe in the 7th grade, but didn’t play either for 40 years until his niece gave him her student clarinet. Before retiring to Wilmington, Plaut started some formal clarinet lessons in Baltimore and continues to take private lessons. But his experience in the OLLI New Horizons Band has heightened his love of music.

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••• The OLLI New Horizons Band performs at Independence Mall during Christmas. The band will perform two concerts this year — one Dec. 5 at Independence Mall and on Dec. 12 at UNCW’s Kenan Auditorium.

“When I retired, my clarinet teacher said ‘Find a group to play with,’” he said. “New Horizons Band was made to order — my first concert band since high school!”

Plaut said it is fun to make music together and he has met some terrific people.

“I think our band is an inspiration to others to be active in their later years,” said Plaut, who continues to see patients part-time in his Hampstead practice and is a part-time psychology faculty member at UNCW. He added that playing music also stimulates the brain and is wonderful exercise for dexterity.

Although most New Horizons bands across the country are geared only toward seniors, the Wilmington band is open to adults of any age, experienced or beginner. The band members range in age from the 30s to the 80s. For beginner players, guidance is provided. UNCW music students are involved with teaching band members, making the experience a multigenerational one.

The Dec. 12 concert will feature holiday selections, including a piece from *The Nutcracker*. Also performing on stage that evening will be the Petite Arpeggio chamber group and the Artistry in Jazz Orchestra. Tickets are \$5 at the door. UNCW students are free with an ID. The band’s Dec. 5 performance at Independence Mall is free.

For more information about the OLLI New Horizons Band, check out their website at www.uncw.edu/olli/newhorizons.html or call the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at 910.962.3195. LOL

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