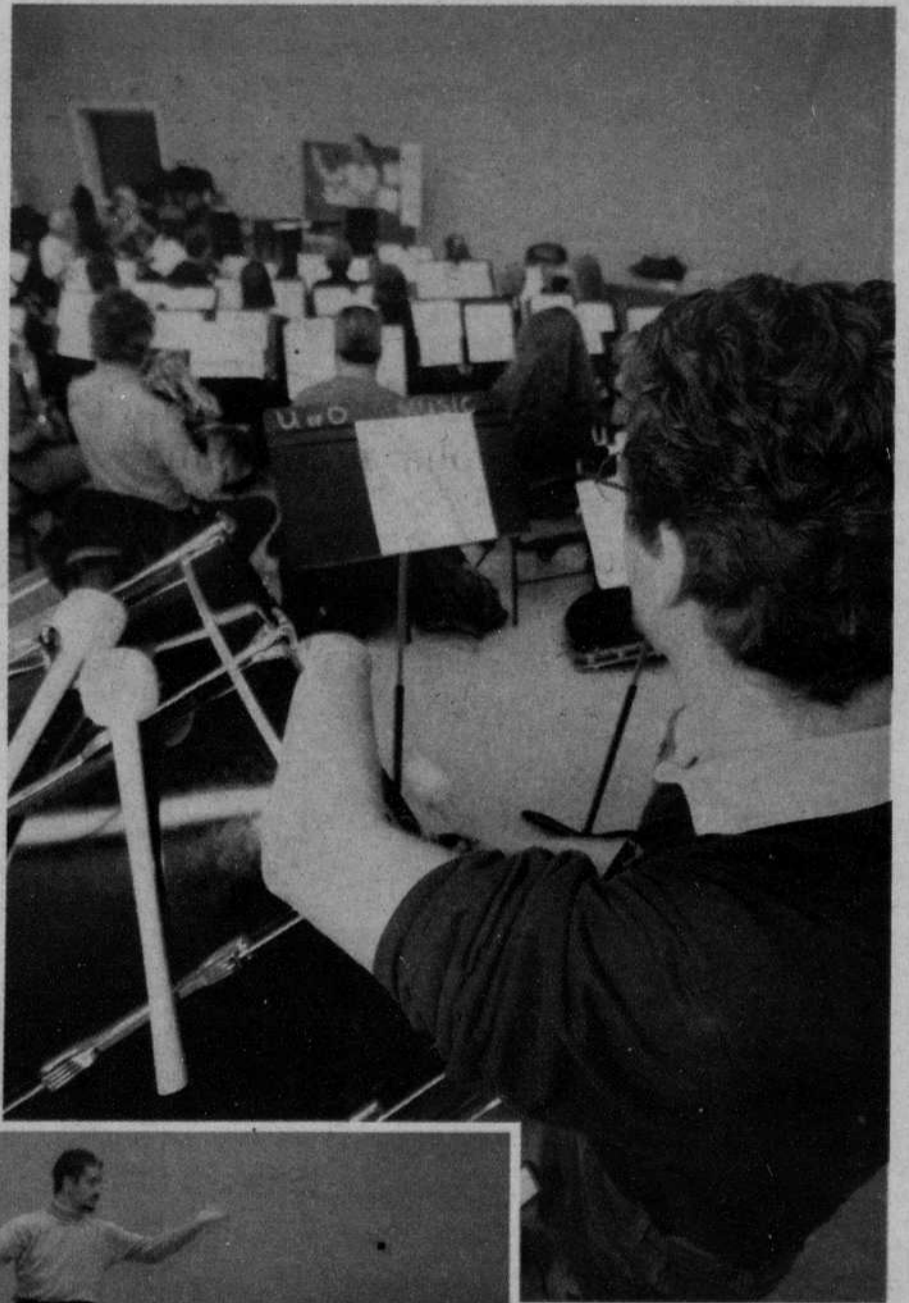


The Sounds of Experience

The 42nd season of the Eugene Symphonic Band kicks off with a new conductor at the helm and some new talent behind the instruments



By Jack Clifford
Oregon Daily Emerald

On July 15, 1957, Ford Motor Company began production on its newest automobile, which promised to be a car of the future with loads of luxury items, cool-looking extras and other highly touted bells and whistles.

The Edsel lasted just three years before landing in the junkyard of history.

That same month, Robert Wagner introduced the Eugene Symphonic Band to the community and one simple factor has kept it alive until today: solid musicianship.

"The quality of the band has always stayed the same — this has always been a high-quality group," says tuba player Dwight Vance, who has played with the band since its inception. "[Wagner] was a real stickler for quality, and he wouldn't accept anything less."

The Eugene Symphonic Band begins its 42nd season Monday night at Beall Concert Hall, with a program that includes traditional band music, marches and dances.

The band started out as a summertime collaboration, Vance says, and its inaugural appearance that year was at the local July 4 fireworks display. Like many of the other musicians in the group, Vance is a retired music teacher — he taught in Corvallis and has been making the commute to rehearse and perform since the early '70s.

This season finds a new face at the front of the band. With long-time conductor and University music instructor Robert Ponto on a one-year sabbatical, Timothy Reynolds, who also conducts the University Wind Ensemble, takes over the baton.

"He's been a really nice addition, mainly because Tim demands a lot out of the group, but this group is very musically qualified and is capable of coming up to the expectations that are asked of us," president of the group, Russ Wakefield, says. "Tim knows his music very well and he comes extremely well-prepared. He has us playing really well this year."



In addition to his work with the wind ensemble, Reynolds brings quite a bit of experience and knowledge to the conductor's stand. He holds music degrees from California State University, Chico and Northern Arizona University. Reynolds is currently a doctoral student at the University.

Not only has he honed his talent in the scholarly realm, but Reynolds is also familiar with the Eugene Symphonic Band. Since moving to Eugene three years ago, he says he has attended as many performances as possible and even served as guest conductor for a few summer performances.

Still, the heat is turned up a tad now that he is in the spotlight for Monday's season-opening concert.

"Fortunately, since I've had a couple of opportunities to guest conduct in kind of a less formal way, I am a little less nervous about it," Reynolds says. "This group has a tradition of being a fine ensemble, with excellent performances, and I've heard just some outstanding things. More than anything I am excited about the opportunity to conduct a fine group of really seasoned musicians."

Reynolds admits that he pays a lot of attention to detail, but at the same time he says his ultimate

goal is to make the performers feel comfortable by bringing clarity to his conducting. He also balances what a composer intended for any particular musical selection with his own take on the music.

"It needs to be fun for the players because they're here to play and have a good time; but they want to sound good as well and these people know what it takes to sound good," Reynolds says. "Our rehearsals are sprinkled with light-hearted times, but overall they're pretty serious rehearsals because that's what [the performers] really like."

"This group comes prepared to a performance. There's never a feeling of 'I hope it comes together at the concert.'"

All of the members donate their time to the band and the group survives through community donations and ticket sales. In addition to Monday night's show, the band will perform three times between now and mid-May.

Wakefield guesses that about one-half of the band's 60 members are either active or retired music teachers. Three-fourths of the band has been involved for close to 20 years, Wakefield estimates, which is about his length of association.

"I don't know exactly — I ran

out of fingers and toes to count," he says with a laugh.

There is a pressing need to begin recruiting younger players to join, Wakefield notes, but it's a difficult task because the older players are reluctant to leave such a high-quality ensemble. He is seeing an influx of students, however, either current college students or those just getting out of school.

One such addition is Matthew Wolfgang, 22, who is a musical education major. His mother Jeanne plays flute in the band and his father Rick has performed with band in the past. Although he is a clarinet player, the younger Wolfgang is sitting in the percussion section for Monday's concert.

"It's very exciting and honorable," he says. "It's really neat to be able to play in a group with adults that I've grown up with. Most of these people have known me since I was very little."

Despite the age differences between him and other members, Wolfgang says he is treated as a peer.

"It's one of the few places where you can sit in a group with professional musicians and feel equal," he explains. "At the University or in high school there's that mentality of 'I'm older than

All photos by Scott Barnett Emerald
The Eugene Symphonic Band opens its 42nd season Monday night at Beall Hall. New conductor Timothy Reynolds (left) will be leading a group of 60 musicians, including percussionist Matthew Wolfgang (above right) and tuba player Dwight Vance (above left).

you, so I'll explain everything. That doesn't work here."

Beyond signing up new blood, Wakefield says the group plays music in concerts that appeals to a very broad audience. The band might perform everything from traditional marches to "very sophisticated, complicated classical music to modern musical scores a la 'Star Wars' and that type of stuff. We've tried to hit every age group with our selections."

Reynolds agrees that Monday's concert will be "upbeat and pretty much what we can call an American concert." The program includes William Schuman's "Chester," Henry Fillmore's "His Honor," Norman Dello Joio's "Satiric Dances" and Guy Woolfenden's "Illyrian Dances," among others.

For the first time in a regular season performance, Reynolds will have a different view of the orchestra. The new conductor just hopes that he can spark the same response he's previously experienced as a listener.

"I've been in the audience many times for Eugene Symphonic Band concerts and the response is always quite surprisingly great," Reynolds says. "The same people come back to hear us, year after year."

The Eugene Symphonic Band is in concert Monday at Beall Concert Hall, with the music beginning at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available at the box office the night of the performance or from any of the band members.

Admission is \$8 for family, \$ for adults and \$2 for students and senior citizens.