

Making music together: the Community Band of the Palouse

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In the midst of a fast-paced era of downloadable music, the Community Band of the Palouse has been practicing a classical way to relax and unwind.

For the last 40 years, anyone with a musical background and an instrument has been encouraged to join. This spring, musicians between the ages of 18 to 94 meet for rehearsal every Tuesday at Pullman High School.

Megan Welling and her four children attend rehearsals and performances regularly.

Sally Horton, after retiring from her career at WSU, decided to pick up the trombone and is now a long-standing member of the band.

David Seamans, an 86-year-old French horn player and current elected band president, has performed with the group for nearly four decades.

For these artists, it's more than just reading black ink spots off of a white page.

"It's a way to find that lost art that you once had," said Nick Courtnage, Pullman High School band director and tuba player.

Courtnage has been a member of the community band for three years and described the experience as a great opportunity for college students to reconnect with their musical abilities.

The band isn't exclusive to college-level professors and students but open to high school and middle school students as well. While middle school musicians are not currently involved, Seamans said, "If they want to play and they feel comfortable playing the music we play, we love to have them."

Denise Snider, the musical director for the Community Band of the Palouse, said the group works as a great bridge between generational gaps for performers.

"I think of each of them as a music education success story because they are carrying what they got in school into their adult lives," she said.

While adults with work schedules may not have the same availability as some student musicians, Snider encouraged that they return to the instruments they once played and rediscover themselves.

“A little effort goes a long way,” she said.

Courtnage acknowledged that one does not have to be the most skilled or talented player to join the band.

“The literature that Denise picks is very approachable,” he said.

A peek into the folders of each band member reveals a broad library of pieces ranging from classic John Philip Sousa marches to more popular collaborations like “The Music of the Beatles” and “Selections from Mary Poppins.”

To diversify things even further, the Community Band also offers a German sub-group, Auf Gehts, for those who want a little more “Oompa” in their lives. This sub-group is an eight-piece twist of the band that closely parallels an authentic polka band.

You can find these bands featured at multiple events around the Palouse including the Micro-brew Festival in Lewiston, the National Lentil Festival in Pullman, and Seaman’s favorite, “Fourth of July before the fireworks in Sunnyside.”

The band will collaborate with the WSU Symphonic Band on April 17 and the Pullman High School band on May 20. All performances are free, but donations are accepted.

The Community Band of the Palouse encourages community members to take a break from digital music and spend an evening immersed in 40 years of tradition and culture here in the Palouse. Rehearsal times are from 7:30 to 9 p.m. on Tuesdays.