

The Score

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From the president

Hello Band,

Time sure moves quickly. It seems like only a short time ago it was daylight till 9pm and temperatures into the 90's. Now it's much cooler, the days are growing shorter, and before long winter will arrive. We even had our first snow flurries in mid-November.

As we move into the winter season, our holiday concert is quickly approaching. The band has been working very hard to get ready and everything is sounding very good. Soon the strings and singers will be joining us to put together the finishing touches. This year our Holiday Concert will be at the Inn at Virginia Tech. This is a new venue for the band and offers a festive location with many beautifully decorated trees and convenient access for the community. Please spread the word by posting the Holiday Concert flyer around the community or emailing it to friends and listservs.

After elections we have the same wonderful board. I wanted to thank the board for all that they do and the time they put in which allows everything to run smoothly. I also want to thank the band because without everyone's dedication there would be no band. While fun, it takes a lot of commitment to give up your Wednesday evenings for rehearsal and to make time for concerts.

Please don't forget about the small group concerts coming up in December. They are a chance to play for the seniors in residential facilities English Meadows and Wheatland Hills. Everyone enjoys our visits and the holiday cheer.

Warm regards,

Jennifer



Seth Williamson (1949-2011)

On October 7, we lost a long-time member of our band and a great friend, Seth Williamson. His deep soothing voice was a companion to many of us throughout the early part of each weekday on Morning Classics, and his horn was a rich and powerful force in the Blacksburg Community Band on Wednesday evenings. We all know that Seth was an avid reader and bird watcher from his radio program, and he often quoted poetry that spoke to nature and the outdoors that he loved. On the radio he was quick to share his knowledge and feelings with us, but he was not quite as outgoing in public.

Some of us were very lucky to know him personally and knew him as a complex, thoughtful, and caring human being. He cared about a lot of things and clearly music was on the top of the list. He was always very critical of the musical side of himself and strove for a high level of musicianship when he performed. He did love to perform.

Back in 1999, Seth was asked to write a short article for the local arts magazine, Expressions. He chose to write about the act of performing music and what it means to the performer. This article is something that all of us can relate to and we are fortunate that Seth has articulated this for us. It is hoped that Seth's words can inspire all of us to enjoy our musical experiences for the beauty and passion that they offer us and celebrate that part of our soul that music touches.

We are a better band for having Seth with us, and we will miss him greatly. Not only as a force in the euphonium section, but as a friend and a companion on the radio.

Ed

A trombonist I know says that the difference between actually playing music and just listening to it is like the difference between making love to a woman and reading love poems. It's not that poetry about love isn't magnificent; it's just that it can't compare with the original experience the poet writes about.

The interesting fact is that you don't have to play at a virtuoso level to discover the truth of this little aphorism. As members of village bands since before Mozart's time have known, even a very average amateur clarinetist or horn player experiences a great work of art from the inside in a way that forever changes how he hears it. Several hundred of your neighbors who play in community bands in Blacksburg, Roanoke, Wytheville and now Galax know this truth first-hand. To work up even a humble band transcription of Wagner's "Tannhauser" overture with other amateur musicians, achieving true musicality perhaps only with a little luck, reveals the composer's genius in a way that few non-playing concertgoers will ever understand.

This rule is probably true in all the arts. Nobody experiences a great picture like the person who's actually tried to put oil on canvas. Only the person who's tried to do a good piece of sculpture really understands what Michaelangelo was up against when he first laid eyes on the unformed chunk of rock that later become the Pietá. George Orwell's crystalline prose flows so naturally from word to word that a masterpiece like the essay "Shooting an Elephant"

looks easy. But only those of us who have tried realize the truth of Somerset Maugham's dictum, "To write simply is as difficult as to be good."

If we've lost anything with the previous century's unprecedented mass delivery of the arts to average people, it would be precisely this primary artistic experience on the part of ordinary folks. A piano was standard equipment in middle-class homes in the latter half of the 19th century, because if you wanted music on a daily basis, you had to make it yourself. It's true that radio and CD's give us the most inspired performances of the greatest music ever written. But the texture of life is vastly different if you experience art solely as a hearer or onlooker and not as a creator, even if only at an amateur level.

It may sound counter-intuitive, but it's been my experience that to make music or other art as part of your daily life immunizes you against one of the great heresies perpetrated by certain publicists for the arts. This is a variant of aestheticism, the idea that art, all by itself, somehow confers moral superiority on its consumer. Some of the most horrific Nazi mass murderers were said to be discriminating judges of Schubert lieder, as Walker Percy vividly illustrates in "The Thanatos Syndrome." Your typical amateur singer or flutist isn't likely to fall for such a dumb idea.

Nevertheless, art adds something irreplaceable to life. And there's no substitute for creating art yourself. In the New River Valley, we're fortunate to have an abundance of opportunities for amateur artistic creation, some of it at a surprisingly high level. If you sing or play, check out the New River Valley Community Chorus or the Blacksburg Community Band. If you draw or paint, get out your charcoal or acrylics and take lessons, create, and display your work with other local artists.

As one of my favorite novelists, Mark Helprin, knows, it's worth striving to create beauty, even if we succeed only intermittently and imperfectly. Because when we do, we grasp something essential about existence.

As his character Allesandro says in "A Soldier of the Great War," "And yet if you asked me what that was [the truth of life], I can't tell you. I can tell you only that it overwhelmed me, that all the hard and wonderful things of the world are nothing more than a frame for a spirit, like fire and light, that is the endless roiling of love and grace. I can tell you only that beauty cannot be expressed or explained in a theory or an idea, that it moves by its own law, that it is God's way of comforting His broken children."

As even the most humble amateur artist knows, it's a great privilege to take part in expressing beauty. Try it and see for yourself.

Written by Seth Williamson for "Art Talk," in the January 2000 issue of the Expressions Magazine (Volume 4, Number 1). Printed by permission.





Holiday concerts

Warm Hearth—Thursday, December 8th, 7:00

Holiday Pops Concert—December 11th, 4:00 pm, The Inn
at Virginia Tech

English Meadows—Friday December 16th, 7:00 (small
group)

Wheatland Hills—Tuesday December 20th, 7:00 (small
group)

What are . . . ?

Small group concerts at Christmastime?

During the holidays, the band plays for various venues, particularly senior residential facilities and groups. We play from songbooks of traditional seasonal music that are less dependent on instrumentation, so that a smaller set of band members who are available can gather and play without extensive rehearsal. All band members are welcome to participate.

Kroger cards?

Part of Kroger's corporate charitable giving is tied to the Kroger gift cards. A charitable organization (like the band!) requests cards and resells the cards to members and friends. Each time more money is put on the gift card, a tally is kept for the specific organization (like the band!). When recharges reach a given amount each month, the charitable organization receives a check for a percentage of the recharged amount. The shopper receives the full value of the gift card, and the cards can be used for any Kroger purchase.



Band personnel

President: Jennifer Hundley [jejohn10 at vt.edu; 540-231-9476, 703-772-7707 (cell)]

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