

History Of The All-State Bands

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Do you ever wonder, as you see the New Jersey All-State Band in its opulent visual and auditory splendor at NJPAC, how it all began? The answer to this question takes us back to the mid 1930's, when a group of band directors, headed by Arthur H. Brandenburg, conceived a plan to set up the finest high school band in the state. Their aim was to bring in the finest high school, college, and professional conductors to motivate the high school players, and to provide "professional development" for the directors by having an instrumental forum weekend culminating in the performance of the All-State Band. The first concert of the New Jersey All-State Band was held on February 13, 1937, at Battin High School in Elizabeth, hosted by Arthur Brandenburg and conducted by William D. Revelli of the University of Michigan. This concert was repeated nine days later at Columbia High School in South Orange, but with local conductors. According to Arthur Brandenburg, "108 players were chosen through stringent tryouts with 28 alternates ready to step in, in case of illness, placement forfeiture or discipline reasons".

After the first 13 years, the directors expanded the festival idea to include more students by having 3 regional bands and then draw the top players from each region into one All-State Band. In the 1950's, as the Region Bands came into being, approximately one third of each Region Band was sent to All-State. Bruce Smith, Director of Home School Band of Southern NJ, tried out and was accepted into Region III Concert Band in 1961. "There were not auditions for All-State Band" notes Smith. "The highest chairs in each region were assigned to play in All-State. As example, if there were six bass clarinets in each region band, the top two from each region were assigned to play in All-State. Seating was done on a rotating basis. One year the top seats were filled by students from Region I, the next year Region II, the following year Region III". This method of selection necessarily involved some "negotiation" among band directors, particularly in percussion where it would be extremely impractical to have three of every percussion instrument in All-State! Smith also notes that "in the 1960's there were fewer schools, and consequently there were many students in the regional bands (and it follows, in All-State) from the same high schools, especially those schools with outstanding music departments."

Noteworthy in the early years was the inclusion of professional soloists to perform with the band, drawn from the Goldman Band, New York Philharmonic, Juilliard, etc. There were student soloists as well, from the band, some of whom performed with piano accompaniment. In more recent times the trend is to showcase the entire group rather than individuals, although it certainly must have been instructive and memorable for the students to have worked closely with a top professional musician.

The early programs show the entire weekend schedule of the Instrumental Forum, the clinic and rehearsal schedule for the students and band directors, as well as the concert selections. The 1950 program, for example, lists a clinic with Saul Goodman, timpanist, two woodwind groups, and an address by Dr. Paul Van Bodegraven of New York University. 1952 brought Sigurd Rascher, saxophonist, who gave a clinic and a recital. The 1958 program lists Sol Schoenbach, bassoonist, and Mason Jones, hornist, both from the Philadelphia Orchestra. The 1967 program dropped the "Instrumental Forum" from the cover page, but the schedule shows Warren Covington (trombonist) and Fred Hinger (timpanist) among the clinicians. After 1967 the clinic schedules were no longer listed in the program, but a clinic committee chairman is shown, indicating that the clinics continued.

The size of the ensemble varied from large to humongous. For example, the 1954 program lists 12 flutes, 7 oboes, 5 bassoons, 2 Eb clarinets, 37 Bb clarinets, 5 alto clarinets, 6 bass clarinets, 6 alto saxes, 3 tenors and 3 baritone saxophones, 14 cornets and trumpets, 12 horns, 6 baritones, 9 tubas, 3 string basses, 2 timpanists, 3 percussion and 1 bells (136 players). The 1958 program shows similar numbers, but with 15 cornets and trumpets, and 9 percussionists. In 1963 it really got crazy, with 3 piccolos, 21 flutes!, 6 oboes, 6 bassoons, 3 Eb clarinets, 30 Bb clarinets, 6 alto and 6 bass clarinets, 2 contra bass clarinets, 6 alto, 3 tenor and 3 bari saxes, 15 cornets and trumpets, 12 horns, 9 trombones, 6 baritones, 9 basses, 3 string basses, 7 percussion, 2 harps, piano & celeste (160 players). 1964 went back to 12 flutes and more manageable numbers in most sections. 1966 shows a piccolo and an English Horn. In 1974 the first wind ensemble appeared, patterned after Fred Fennell's ensemble at Eastman, and the Symphonic Band was reduced to numbers similar to the instrumentation of today. The most consistent section over the decades has been the flutes, numbering 12, except for 21 in 1963, which has not been repeated.

The early programs list the executive committee and a general chairman. Beginning with 1953 the lead member of the committee is listed as All-State Band Coordinator (L. Barry Tedesco, Fair Lawn). In 1954, with the beginnings of the Region Bands, Harry Hannaford (Summit) is listed as Coordinator of All-State and Regional Bands. In 1979 the committee is listed for the first time as the All-State

Procedures Committee, with Herman Dash as chairman and board liaison, and Frank Hughes as coordinator, and Charles Williams as solo chairman, perhaps the first mention of this essential component of the All-State auditions process. The procedures committee continues to be the driving force of the All-State Band to this day. In 2004 the title of All-State Performance Chair was created, a State Board position held by Al Bazzel from its inception.

In the early years, the individual students were responsible for their own housing arrangements. The first program (1937) recommends the Winfield Scott Hotel for \$1.50 per night, double occupancy. The rate for directors is \$2.50 for a single, and \$4.00 total for a double. Later, the students were housed by the parents of the school where the concert was held. In 1960 my parents housed two students, one of whom (Henry Scott) became my college classmate and has had an illustrious career as a bassist in the Philadelphia Orchestra. As issues of control and liability became more acute over time, the students were eventually housed in a hotel under the auspices of the NJMEA. Today housing, transportation and meals are included at a cost of approximately \$300.00 per student.

For many years, the concerts were held at various high schools (occasionally a college), eventually settling in to a regular rotation among the three regions, along with the NJMEA annual conference. In the 1990's it became apparent that attendance at the annual conference was greatest when centrally located, and from 1998 onward the conference has been held in East Brunswick, and nearby Rutgers University has hosted the rehearsals and concerts. In 2003, the All-State Band combined with the All-State Women's Chorus to perform at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in Newark. This liaison enabled the band to perform in a professional venue with superior acoustics, resulting in the enhanced nuances afforded by a professional theater. Rutgers University continues to host the rehearsals.

The NJ All-State Band has earned a reputation among the college band directors as being an ideal appointment, because all of the logistics are handled by the Procedures Committee and its subordinates, enabling the conductor to focus entirely on the musical aspects of the rehearsals and performance. A special thank you is in order to the coordinators, hosts, managers, chaperones and other volunteers who give selflessly of their time and ingenuity to make this happen. Long may it continue!

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