

Leaders of the Band

Band Instructor Nurtures Student Growth

It all starts with a recorder – that beige plastic tube with holes that students are encouraged to explore in the third grade. For some, it is fun to learn a song or two for the annual recorder concert, but their interest is far from a passion. For others, however, it is a defining moment – it's the first time they realize an interest and an aptitude for band music.

Dr. Carol Hahn, mother of three children who play in Ravenscroft's band, will never get the lines "Speed, Bonnie Boat" from the Scottish folk tune "The Skye Boat Song" out of her head. For many years, the song has been included in the year-end recorder concert first started by former Lower School music instructor Vicki Oehling. "My husband and I have attended the recorder concert for so many years that I know the words by heart." Last year, she says, as the youngest of her children played in the recorder concert, she made a video, realizing that this was the end of an era.

Josh Silver '12 says he started Ravenscroft in the third grade and took private piano lessons from now-retired Ravenscroft piano instructor Rebecca Bradley. That was also the year he was first handed a recorder.

"I loved playing piano and stuck with it for a few years. But, in fifth grade it was very cool to be in the band. Everyone talked about the band trips. My friends convinced me to join, and I started playing the saxophone," he said, explaining that his choice was a bit unusual as a first instrument, but it was a tribute to his uncle, a saxophonist.



Bill Pendergrass

Opportunities to Lead

Now about to graduate, Josh has come a long way as a band musician and as a band leader. He plays the sax and the clarinet in the Upper School Band, plays with the Upper School Jazz Ensemble, and continues private clarinet lessons.

Josh is president of the Student Government Association and has been involved with the group since Middle School. He is also a role model and mentor to his younger brother, Matthew '18, who plays clarinet in the Sixth Grade Band.

Josh also heads up the Band Council, a peer-elected advisory group that works with Band Director Bill Pendergrass to plan the year's concerts and

trips and tackle a variety of issues from grading rubrics to practice assignments.

The Band Council is a concept that Pendergrass insti-

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~ Bill Pendergrass



tuted a few years ago. "I want to stand back and let them make decisions on their own. It's an opportunity for them to gain leadership experience in a safe, nurturing environment," he said. Leaders have emerged, as he knew they would.

Pendergrass asked Josh to take on a leadership role in the Band Council because of his experience in student government, and because he was respected by his peers.

"Mr. P listens to us and involves us. Whether or not he makes all the changes we suggest, we are involved and we know he is listening. It's good to be involved," said Josh. "I've gained so much just by knowing music and by being a student conductor, and I will use those skills in whatever I do in life."

Pendergrass strongly believes in encouraging band members to be personally responsible for their own growth in the program, but also to step up and help others. He enjoys watching his students' progress from making tentative sounds on their instruments in fifth grade, to "running the show."

"Playing in the band should be challenging for freshmen, and it should offer the older students opportunities for solos and other leadership roles," said Pendergrass.

"This year, the students in the Upper School Band have been together since fourth grade. They enjoy making music together and they enjoy the sanctuary of the band room. We have fun, but we make seriously good music!" he said.

Excellence Validated

That "good music" has consistently won awards through the years. The fifth-grade band participates every spring in the Carowinds Music Festival in Charlotte and consistently earn Superior marks for its performances. The Middle School bands perform very well annually in the Central District Bandmasters Association Musical Performance



Josh Silver '12

Adjudication and either the Musicales Festival or the Festival in the Parks in Williamsburg, Va. The current senior class participated in the Washington, D.C., Heritage Music Festival in 2008 as eighth graders and earned a Superior rating and First Place Middle School Band. The Upper School Band played in the Atlanta Heritage Music Festival last year and earned a Superior rating and First Place awards.

In addition, many students regularly perform in the annual All-District Band by virtue of an audition, and several participate in the North Carolina All-State Honors Band, an ensemble that recognizes the best performers throughout the state.

A Family Affair

Many Ravenscroft families see the value in being a part of Ravenscroft's band program. They are proud that all of their children are band members, despite the family commitment it entails.

"Our fifth grader, Alexis, began band this year with Mr. Pendergrass," said Sonja Fenner. "She is following in the footsteps of her older sister, Amber '10. Alexis always told everyone that she would play the flute like her big sister. She's happy to be continuing the family tradition."

"So many families are involved in band," said Pendergrass. "We have the Silvers, Hahns, Tabets, Shearins, Aschmans, Dubows, Withers, Joneses, Mosses, and many others over the years. The program is designed to help students progress from Lower School until they graduate the Upper School."

Pendergrass proudly expounds on the many alumni who have gone on to play music in college and professionally. For a relatively small school, he says his colleagues are amazed at his students' expertise. "It is a great joy to stand in front of our Upper School band. It's an immense privilege."

Hahn says that as a two-career family, she finds great value that both fine arts and athletic activities are offered on campus, during and after school. And, the family has greatly enjoyed attending some of the band competitions and performance trips. "The trips are a highlight of the kids' band experience," she said. "Being a part of the band is an important dimension in their education."

Academics, Music and Sports

Many of the band members are athletes as well, and most are top scholars. It's far from unusual to see a varsity football player finish trombone practice and then rush to a football practice or a clarinetist expertly spike a volleyball. In fact, 51 of the 58 Upper School Band members this year also play a school sport. They also know how to hit the books, achieving high academic success. This year's seniors have already accepted invitations to attend Brown University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and the University of South Carolina.

Growing up as a band student means being a proud member of a family, and part of a musical legacy. For Pendergrass' students, the Ravenscroft band room is indeed a place to learn about life and leadership.

It's funny to think that for so many, it all starts with that recorder in the third grade. 