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After 800 concerts and 300 parades, Waldwick conductor still going strong

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WALDWICK — In 40 years, Ed Moderacki has conducted close to 800 concerts, 300 parades and 10,000 pieces of music with the Waldwick Community Band, which is marking its 65th anniversary.

Moderacki, a River Vale music teacher for 45 years, explained that while the players all know their notes, it's the conductor's responsibility to bring them all together into an enjoyable experience.

That means being prepared.

“A lot of people think the conductor has the easiest job by not playing an instrument,” Moderacki said. “When we do a piece of music, I have to spend time conducting by myself and making determinations as to when certain sections go, the balance of the ensemble, which instruments need to be heard more, which instruments need to be heard less ... All this takes place beforehand.”

For instance, for the band's performance of "Colonial Song" during a concert Sunday, Nov. 18, at the borough's Village School, Moderacki noted that composer Percy Grainger "really relished combining instruments together in different combinations," and the trick is to make sure there is a balance.

“The conductor starts and stops the band and determines the speed of the music, the loudness and softness,” he said.

Some of his favorites to conduct are "Suites for Band" and "Hammersmith," both by Gustav Holst, and Broadway show arrangements, especially those by Robert Russell Bennett.

Aside from his role on the rostrum, Moderacki plays four instruments. Starting the trumpet in fourth grade, he also plays the euphonium, tuba and string bass.



Ed Moderacki, seen at a performance on Sunday, Nov. 18, 2018, has conducted close to 800 concerts, 300 parades and 15,000 pieces of music with the Waldwick Community Band, which is marking its 65th anniversary.
(Photo: Meghan Grant/northjersey.com)

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It was his tuba-playing that earned him a place in the band. Shortly after graduating from Montclair State with a degree in music education, Moderacki got a call from the band director and founder, Dr. Walter Nallin.

“They said they needed another tuba player, so I started playing with them,” Moderacki said. “They were a very active band, doing Friday night concerts at the Bergen Mall,” which was still an open-air mall at the time. When Dr. Nallin died, he became the next music director.

“I have been conducting the band since May of 1978,” Moderacki said.

Waldwick Mayor Thomas Giordano read a proclamation for the longtime conductor during the Nov. 18 concert. He’ll also be honored during Monday’s council meeting and on the borough electronic bulletin board. He has received letters of commendation from Sen. Cory Booker, Sen. Bob Menendez and Rep. Josh Gottheimer.

A volunteer music organization supported by the borough and donations, the Waldwick Community Band is celebrating another landmark: 65 years.

The band was founded in 1954 as the Waldwick Fire Department Band, said President Robert Kaufmann. At the time, departments organized marching bands to perform during parades. It was made up of former members of other area bands, such as Waldwick’s Italian Band and the Postal Carriers’ Band. A year after its creation, it started doing concerts, too, and in 1968, it was reorganized as the Community Band of Waldwick.

“We’ve had many people, great players, with us over the years, and most of the players have been with us a long time,” Moderacki said.

A milestone for him was being a guest conductor for the United States Air Force Band, performing in Waldwick. He was also conductor for the All Bergen County High School Band in 2000 and the All Bergen County Middle School Band in 2012.

As the saying goes, the show must go on. Over the years, the band has had its share of hurdles. The rehearsal for Sunday’s performance was canceled by snow, and outdoor concerts are often threatened by rain.

“One time we were playing a piece and the fire alarm went off. We had been warned by the fire marshal beforehand that it was probably not a fire. The band was playing in meter in four but the fire alarm was going off in meter in three,” Moderacki said.

After first meeting at a band in Teaneck, Moderacki got to know his future wife, Brenda, a clarinet and alto clarinet player, when she joined Waldwick in 1997.

“I joined this band, and within a few months he invited me out to the opera, and that was it,” she said.

The next performance of the Waldwick Community Band is scheduled for Feb. 2, 2019, at the Village School. Music includes selections from the Orange Bowl and the movie “The Greatest Showman.”