

# A Preliminary Study of Community Bands in Ontario

Roger Mantie

The community band is part of our musical heritage...a heritage that many of us have ignored in the excitement created by the growth of instrumental music in our schools. Adult bands still exist and are indeed growing, both in numbers and in size.<sup>1</sup>

The profession of music education is, historically speaking, relatively new. While the teaching and learning of music is not, and the presence of music in schools is not, music education as a profession emerged in Canada following the Second World War, when instrumental music programs began to take hold in Canadian schools. The Canadian Music Educators' Association was first formed in 1959 and, although the Canadian Bandmasters' Association dates from 1931, the current Canadian Band Association emerged as recently as the 1970s. While the exact boundaries of "music education" are occasionally called into question, it seems clear that today the term usually refers to the teaching of music in schools or the preparation of teachers for same.

## Community Bands in Canada (and Why Music Educators Should Care)

Schools and universities have become the predominant venue for wind-band activity today. The age of professional bands has long since passed, as have most of the industrial bands and, in Canada, a large number of the military bands as well. There is, of course, a certain irony that the emergence of the field of music education in the 1950s and '60s coincided with a decline in community-band activity. While it is true that town and community bands experienced periods of decline following the war,<sup>2</sup> many sustained the "lean years" of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s thanks to dedicated individuals who refused to let traditions die.

A series of articles in *The Instrumentalist* and *The School Musician* from the 1970s and '80s point encouragingly to pockets of expanding community-band activity.<sup>3</sup> The *Canadian Band Journal* (1987, 11:3, 11:4, 12:1), too, published a three-part article which extolled the virtues of John Paynter's experience in forming and directing the Northshore Concert Band in Evanston, Illinois, and implored band directors to pursue similar initiatives. One assumes that the statement quoted at the outset of this article, dating from 1985, was directed towards school and university band directors, perhaps as a reminder that community bands still exist and deserve greater recognition and support.

Exact figures are not known but anecdotal and informal evidence points to slow but steady growth in community-band activity in North America, generally, and in Canada, specifically. The New Horizons program, for example, boasts of substantial expansion in the area of adult bands (see [www.newhorizonsmusic.org](http://www.newhorizonsmusic.org)). Web sites such as Graham Nasby's Canadian "Community Band and Orchestra" page ([www.grahamnasyby.com/misc/music\\_local-resources.shtml](http://www.grahamnasyby.com/misc/music_local-resources.shtml)), the CBA-Ontario Chapter band directory ([www.canadianbandassociation.ca/ont-bands.shtml](http://www.canadianbandassociation.ca/ont-bands.shtml)), and the "Blue Pages" of *The Whole Note* ([thewholenote.com](http://thewholenote.com)), provide ample evidence of such activity. The Association of Concert Bands ([www.acbands.org](http://www.acbands.org)), formed in the U.S.A. in

1977 as an organization for community bands, also shows signs of dynamic membership, and Yahoo has an active band and orchestra community-music listserv ([c-m@yahoogroups.com](mailto:c-m@yahoogroups.com)). All of this points to growing activity in the area of community bands.

Community bands are not all of the same stripe, of course. Some are continuations or evolutions of long-standing town/municipal bands or "Boys and Girls Bands," while others (e.g., New Horizons bands) are newer organizations capitalizing on the desire of older adults for a musical outlet. The renaissance of community bands has attracted the notice of researchers. While studies on adults performing in amateur musical groups date as far back as 1932, the number of dissertations and research studies on community music-making has rapidly escalated since the 1980s. This research examines various issues, such as specific ensembles or geographic regions (e.g., Bowen 1995; Cunningham 2002; Thaller 1999), members' attitudes and characteristics (e.g., Cavitt 2005; Griffith 2006;), and perceived benefits of participation, such as lifelong learning (e.g., Busch 2005; Myers 1986), leisure and quality of life (e.g., Dabback 2007; Rohwer 2008), and meaning-making (e.g., Bryce 2003).<sup>4</sup>

Despite the seeming expansion in community-band activity and research into it, this social practice, engaged in by thousands of Canadians, so often seems to fly under the radar of even those who have participated in school music programs, not to mention music educators themselves. The comments of a musician from a recreational wind band at the University of Toronto are telling. In a research study I conducted, this participant remarked on why so few of her friends from high school continued to play their instruments after graduation:

I think there is a lack of [bands] for people to be in music for fun. I don't think they're out there...

While some community bands have audition requirements, many that would gladly welcome new members do not. This participant's viewpoint might be considered an anomaly, of course, but research (Mantie and Tucker 2008) shows that this kind of perception is common among recent graduates of school music programs. Community "banding" seems to bring to mind Ruth Finnegan's *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*, which details the various and plentiful forms of music-making that go unnoticed by the general population. It also brings to mind the tenuous connection that too often seems to exist between music-making during and after the school years (see Regelski 1998). Consider the following appeal:

Music educators the country over are looking for similar opportunities where music of the public schools will find a real "carry over" into adult life. Many believe that activities of this type should be supported, or at least aided, by appropriations from municipal funds, for they are truly civic enterprises from which all citizens may benefit – and such benefits are enhanced in the degree that the voluntary efforts of the amateur musicians are made more potent through local support and encouragement.<sup>5</sup>

This statement appeared in a post-World War II issue of the *Music Educators Journal* (Brandenburg 1946, 28). The issue of "carry over" seems as relevant today as it did over sixty years ago.

Allow me to suggest four practical benefits of increased community-band activity for the field of music education. First, rather than attempting to persuade students and parents that studying music will somehow improve their math scores or make them better people, one can simply point out that music-making can be a worthwhile, lifelong endeavour. Second, increased music-making outside of school almost always leads to greater public

# A Preliminary Study of Community Bands in Ontario

support for music learning in school. When the community band performs publicly, especially at civic functions, there is a visibility that translates into tangible evidence for learning music: music-making is a real-life activity that occurs in the community.

Third, the more community bands there are, the more likely it is that one or more musicians will have personal connections to people who exercise political decision-making in education. It means more when the advocacy comes from individuals other than the music director (who can be perceived as speaking out of self-interest) or some ancillary organization. Fourth, by expanding the scope of such activities, more music-making tends to result, and music educators can spend less time advocating and more time teaching.

Music educators should care about community bands out of more than self-interest, of course. As research suggests, community-band activity has many benefits for its participants and the community, and these benefits should be paramount. By connecting the concerns of music education with that of community bands, I am promoting what is sometimes referred to as the field of “service delivery.” in order to maximize the potential of both areas, it helps to know more about those currently involved in community bands. With this in mind, and under the auspices and support of the Wilfrid Laurier Centre for Music in the Community, the Trillium Foundation, and the Canadian Band Association-Ontario Chapter, I undertook a preliminary study of community band members, the results of which I hope will be of interest to school music educators as well as those already involved with community bands.

## The Study<sup>6</sup>

The population for this study was defined as all Ontario community bands appearing on the Graham Nasby and Canadian Band Association-Ontario Web sites. To ensure geographic diversity, the list was stratified into three regions: the Greater Toronto area, southwestern Ontario, and the rest of the province. Three ensembles from each region were chosen randomly. All selected bands agreed to participate. A 95-item survey generated 275 responses from the nine ensembles. While the results may not be indicative of all community bands in Canada, it is hoped they will provide some descriptive data about community-band participation that will be useful in the area of service delivery; that is, music educators should be able to use the results of this survey to better understand the characteristics, motivations, and desires of community-band musicians in order to improve community-band “delivery” practices, as well as school-music curriculum and instruction.

The study sought to address the following questions:

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of selected community-band musicians?
2. What are the musical backgrounds of community-band musicians?
3. How do community-band musicians conceptualize their participation and their reasons for participating?

Due to space considerations, only some of the results can be reported here. Anyone wishing a more detailed report may contact me at [roger.mantie@utoronto.ca](mailto:roger.mantie@utoronto.ca).

Overall, the “typical” community-band musician is older (over 45), physically healthy, white, non-smoking, non-drinking, church-going, well-educated, upper middle-class, married with children, active in the community, studied piano and sang in a choir at some point, learned to play his/her instrument in school, enjoys classical music, and chooses to play

in the band for both musical and social reasons. More specifically, results from this survey show a slightly higher male than female membership (52% to 41%; 7% no response), which is not consistent with Griffith (2006), who found higher female participation among community-band members. Band-by-band analysis showed variations, with two ensembles having slighter more females than males, and at least two with very few females. Gender distribution, it seems, may be due more to localized factors than to any global phenomena.

Twenty-seven percent of respondents reported their age as 65 or older, forty percent as 45-60, twenty-five percent as 20-45, and six percent were under 20 (2% no response). They also tend to be better educated and have higher family incomes—the latter characteristic perhaps contributing to the fact that forty-seven percent of respondents report owning professional-model instruments. High-school diplomas were attained by fourteen percent of those surveyed, undergraduate degrees by fifty-eight percent, master’s degrees by fifteen percent, and doctorates by eight percent. Only four percent reported family income under \$20,000. Sixteen percent were in the \$20-50K income bracket, seventeen percent in the \$50-75K bracket, twenty-five percent the \$75-125K bracket, and twenty-one percent reported incomes of over \$125K (17% did not answer the question). The relatively high family incomes may be attributable to the levels of education.

It should be noted that education and income did vary somewhat by ensemble, although no ensemble reported more than forty percent of members with family income of \$50K or less, nor did any ensemble have over forty percent of members with an education level of high school or less. While it is tempting to draw a positive connection between education level and community-band music-making, the failure to reflect Canadian demographics more adequately (in terms of education and income) should be cause for concern among those who do not wish community bands to be, or be perceived as, an elitist activity.

Given the self-report of general good health and seventy-eight percent reporting regular exercise at least two to three or more times per week, it would appear that overall health and well-being is very important to these community-band members. This raises the issue of whether community-band activity contributes to well-being or whether members who enjoy good health and well-being choose to participate in community bands. Although fifty-eight percent report themselves as married and sixty-four percent have children, it is worth noting that thirty-four percent are single, separated/divorced, or widowed, and thirty-five percent do not have children, suggesting that participation for some may be linked in some way to a need for social inclusion.

Self-reports of reasons for participating in community bands are noteworthy. For example, while seventy-nine percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “*Social interaction with other musicians is important to me,*” the arithmetic means (on a scale of 1 to 5) for responses to the question, “*What are your reasons for being in this ensemble?*” were: the music (4.45), social/people in the group (2.91), the conductor (2.69), convenience of time/location (2.11), and “other” (1.25). (All “other” responses were related to the opportunity to play).

Overall, the results on questions related to motivation factors appear consistent with Arasi (2006), Busch (2005), and Kruse (2007). Clearly, while social factors are important to community-band members, “the music” is the most critical factor in their participation. The fact that thirty

# A Preliminary Study of Community Bands in Ontario

percent reported that the ensemble they play in is not the closest one to where they live, with thirty-five percent traveling more than ten kilometers to attend, suggests that many members are selective about either the musical level of the group, the individuals in the group, or the conductor of the group. This also speaks to how seriously community-band members take their participation, something corroborated by the fact fifty-eight percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “*Outside of work and family, playing with the band is more important than my other activities.*” In addition, fifty-eight percent also report practicing privately twice a week or more frequently.

## Discussion

This study’s results provide mixed implications for school curricula and instruction. For example, on the one hand, sixty-six percent of the participants learned to play their instrument in school, and seventy-three percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “*I feel my school music experience prepared me well for participation in this band.*” Clearly, there is a positive connection between school music programs and community-band activity, and school music programs appear to be doing a good job of imparting skills and knowledge conducive to community-band participation.

On the other hand, that so many community-band members did not learn to play their instruments in school (33%) is also telling. It may be that people who learn to play outside of school are more likely to participate in community-band activity, an explanation that begs the question of why more people who are taught in school do not desire to continue their concert-band experience beyond the school years.

The findings raise other questions related to service delivery. While community bands may be conceptualized and understood in a variety of ways, such as, for example, a sociological or historical phenomenon, an institution of lifelong learning, or simply as a form of recreation, from the standpoint of music education a better understanding of community bands should help, if only in part, with curricular and instructional planning. I am not suggesting that all instrumental music-teaching in schools should be (re)designed towards lifelong involvement in community bands. The term “music education” often implies something beyond just the teaching and learning of how to play an instrument. I am suggesting, however, that music educators can and should do more in terms of promoting what David Myers (2008) calls “lifespan engagement” in music.

There are several arguments to be made for community-band music-making, only a few of which I have articulated here. Contributions to physical and mental health, the fulfilling use of leisure time, and improvements to “quality of life” are all admirable and worthwhile benefits of community bands, but permit me to suggest that the area of learning, or perhaps “lifelong” learning, is something that might fall most directly under the purview of music educators.

In the opinion of Constantijn Koopman, the failure to embrace community music as an opportunity to broaden the conception and practice of music education is lamentable:

As long as we do not develop such perspectives [to broaden music education], we deprive large groups of children and adults of excellent opportunities to develop their musical abilities. Don’t let us waste the chance to offer them music education rather than short-lived musical kicks (Koopman 2007, 161).

In spite of Koopman’s somewhat pejorative tone, his admonishment does resonate with this study’s results, which found that only eight percent of

participants felt they had learned an “appreciation of music.” Far more (36%) felt they had learned about music and music-making. Moreover, while perhaps a more educational than musical outcome, thirty-one percent felt they had learned about interpersonal matters, and seventeen percent felt they learned about themselves and their own character.

If music educators care about the overall musical (and educational) health of society (locally, regionally, provincially, nationally), then restricting professional concern to just one’s immediate students is insufficient. Community-band music-making can (and should) continue to be entertaining and a worthwhile use of leisure time. There is no reason, however, why this focus cannot include a greater degree of musical learning along the way.

Concert bands will almost certainly continue to be a basis for school and university music instruction for the foreseeable future, and therefore it behooves music educators to pay greater attention to the community-band experience. While rather self-evident, it bears noting that community bands exist for very different reasons than school and university bands. The performance standards of community bands vary from group to group, but the ensembles, as a form of amateur music-making, exist primarily for the benefit and enjoyment of the members, not the musical expectations of their audiences or the expressed purpose of attaining the highest possible professional standards—although, notably, the number one response (27%) to a question about what would improve the community-band experience was “more rehearsals” and “higher performance standards.”

Community and school bands may be similar in many respects, but it may be sage advice for current educators and community-band leaders to observe the important differences as well. Music educators can and should look upon community-band activity as an opportunity to expand the boundaries of music education and, in the process, contribute to the musical vitality of their communities and enhance the educational possibilities for current and future students. Those wishing to learn or experience more about community bands should plan to attend the upcoming conference, “Music Around Us,” planned for 7-10 May 2009 at Wilfrid Laurier University. Contact Michael Purves-Smith at <s.purvessmith@rogers.com> for further information.

## REFERENCES

1. Keith Mann, “Nuances,” *Canadian Band Journal*, 9:3 (1985), 2.
2. John Paynter lamented in 1966, “The post-college band activity in America today can be described as hardly significant” (quoted in Spencer 1996, 16).
3. Some examples include Frederic Boots, “1971 Community Band Survey,” *The Instrumentalist* 25:9 (April 1971), 46; Kenneth Neidig, “Survey of Community Bands in the U.S.A.,” *The Instrumentalist* 30:4 (November 1975), 40; Kenneth Neidig, “A Second Look at America’s Community Bands,” *The Instrumentalist* 31:5 (December 1976), 30; H. Wenger, “The Community Band and Music After Graduation,” *The School Musician* 48 (Jun - Jul 1977), 36-8.
4. For a good general overview see Don Coffman, “Adult education” in R. Colwell and C. Richardson (eds.), *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
5. The author is alluding to band tax laws. The Landers Band Tax Law in the United States, passed by half of the states starting in 1921, allowed cities to tax themselves to support town bands (Graham 1951, 168). Ontario had a similar statute, the Ontario Band Tax Law, passed in 1937 ([www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=U1ARTU0000545](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=U1ARTU0000545)).
6. A more detailed report of this study is being prepared. This article is an overview for the readership of *Canadian Winds*.

## WORKS CITED


- Arasi, Melissa. “Adult Reflections on a High School Choral Music Program: Perceptions of Meaning And Lifelong Influence.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Georgia State University, 2006.
- Bowen, Charles. “Adult Community Bands in The Southeastern United States: An

# A Preliminary Study of Community Bands in Ontario

- Investigation of Current Activity and Background Profiles of the Participants.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Florida State University, 1995.
- Brandenburg, Arthur. “Music Education Need Not Stop at Graduation.” *Music Educators Journal* 32:6 (1946), 26-28.
- Bryce, Pandora. “Meaning-Making in Music: The Personal Constructs of Musicians.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2003.
- Busch, Maria. “Predictors of Lifelong Learning in Music: A Survey of Individuals Participating in Ensembles at Community Colleges in Illinois.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005.
- Cavitt, M. “Factors Influencing Participation in Community Bands.” *Journal of Band Research* 41:1 (2005), 42-59.
- Cunningham, Gregory. “A History and Socio-cultural Examination of the Long Beach Municipal Band.” Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2002.
- Dabback, William. “Toward a Model of Adult Music Learning as a Socially-Embedded Phenomenon.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 2007.
- Finnegan, Ruth H. *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Griffith, Martha. “Personality Traits and Musical Interests of Adult Learners in an Instrumental Music Program.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2006.
- Koopman, Constantijn. “Community Music As Music Education: On the Educational Potential of Community Music.” *International Journal Of Music Education* 25:2 (2007), 151-163.
- Kruse, Nathan. “Andragogy and Music: Canadian and American Models of Music Learning Among Adults.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 2007.
- Mantie, Roger and Lynn Tucker. “Closing the Gap: Does Music Making Have to Stop Upon Graduation?” *International Journal of Community Music* 1:2 (2008), 217-227.
- Martin, Peter. “A Status Study of Community Bands in the United States.” Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1983.
- Myers, David. “Lifespan Engagement and the Question of Relevance: Challenges For Music Education Research in the Twenty-First Century.” *Music Education Research* 10:1 (2008), 1-14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “An Investigation of the Relationship Between Age and Music Learning in Adults.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1986.
- Regelski, Thomas. “Schooling for Musical Praxis.” *Finish Journal of Music Education* 3:1 (1998), 7-37.
- Rohwer, Debbie. “Health and Wellness Issues for Adult Band Musicians.” *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 23:2 (2008), 54.
- Spencer, William. “An Attitude Assessment of Amateur Musicians in Community Bands.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Texas, 1996.
- Thaller, G. P. “The Community Contributions, Recruitment, And Retention Practices of Select Adult Community Bands in Eastern Massachusetts.” Unpublished D.M.E. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1999.




**Roger Mantie** is a Ph.D. candidate in Music Education at the University of Toronto, where he has conducted the Hart House Symphonic Band and directed the Royal Conservatory of Music Jazz Ensemble. His research interests lie in theorizing avocational and lifelong music-making, music teacher training, and school curriculum and instruction. His dissertation, “Stylizing Lives: Selected Discourses in Instrumental Music Education,” uses the work of Michel Foucault to examine disciplinary discourses.



Bachelor of Music since 1963  
Master of Music since 1980  
Jazz Studies since 2002

*Inspiring*  
**Musicians**  
since 1906

- World-class faculty
- World-class facilities
- World-class students



**BRANDON UNIVERSITY**  
Founded 1899

**School of Music**

270 - 18th Street | Brandon, Manitoba | R7A 6A9 | (204) 727-7388  
music@brandonu.ca | [www.brandonu.ca](http://www.brandonu.ca)

## Bill's Horn Shop

For All Your Wind Instrument Needs  
Pour tous vos besoins en instruments à Vent

William Cosman  
4 Pleasant Street  
Moncton, NB  
E1A 2T6  
Tel: (506) 382-8106  
Fax: (506) 859-4830  
billshornshop@roger.com



 **Music Direct**

The discerning director's choice for  
quality concert / jazz band music,  
supplies, service.

**403-287-7787**

toll free 877-387-7787  
musicdir@telus.net  
recordings and more at: [www.musicdirectltd.com](http://www.musicdirectltd.com)