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Enthusiasts witness Orangeville community band rebirth

By WES KELLER
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About 120 enthusiasts attended the formal rebirth of

the Orangeville Community Band at Westside Secondary School on Dec. 20, and were rewarded with a rousing concert of traditional Christmas

music.

The 35-member group might have had the shortest gestation period in history for a concert band of its size.



MEMBERS OF THE ORANGEVILLE Community band take to the stage in a pre-Christmas performance held at Westside Secondary. Photo/WES KELLER

Organizer/conductor John Wervers, who teaches music at all three Dufferin high schools, said he was approached by a local resident in September, and agreed to give it a whirl.

At conception in September, the band had eight members. By Dec. 8, when it played a two-hour informal Saturday show at Orangeville Mall, it had grown to its present 35 — all evidently dedicated, as they went on from there to do a concert at Lord Dufferin Centre the following Thursday, Dec. 13, and then the formal one at Westside the following Thursday.

It hasn't stopped growing in its infancy. Mr. Wervers said people have been phoning as word of the reborn band gets out. "Every week, two or three people call. Another six or seven enquired after the (mall concert). They'll likely be at the Jan. 10 practice."

The aim for 2008 is to have 50 instruments in the band. If

it can grow to 35 from eight in not much over two months, that shouldn't be an unrealistic target, especially when people who haven't played in decades have started dusting off brass that's been relegated to a forgotten spot in the attic.

Half of the band members are former students of Mr. Wervers' classes. Some are current high school students, and others are retired — at least one of whom hadn't touched an instrument in 40 years.

Whether it is the dedicated spirit of the members or the accommodating nature of the organization that has led to the band's early success might be problematic. Some people want to play but don't have an instrument. There's usually someone who has an instrument not in use.

How can you get this kind of mix to work together as a cohesive concert orchestra? Going into 2008, Mr. Wervers

is researching archives and putting together spring concerts that he knows would work for the majority of members.

You can join by calling Mr. Wervers (519-925-6149), Stan Elliotson (519-941-6569), Dave Lewars (519-940-9011), by dropping into Westside High School any Thursday between 7 and 9 p.m., or contacting any of the band members.

The organizers might be considered "the music men," but the band doesn't have 76 trombones. And it's not a marching band. Instead, it has four trombones, four flutes, six clarinets, an oboe, bassoon, tuba and percussion, three alto and three tenor saxophones, one baritone saxophone, six trumpets, two French horns, and two euphonias. And for the moment, we're focused on concerts. We'll see where it goes, one step at a time," said Mr. Wervers.

The band is a rebirth because Orangeville, like Shelburne and every other urban community, used to have a town band. There may be more than 100 in existence in Ontario even now, but that might be only one-tenth of what there once were.

In Shelburne, a small concert band was formed in 2005, and held its first concert in May of that year.

Orangeville's original band, like so many others, died in the 1960s, perhaps following the virtual demise of the "big band era" and the emergence of smaller combos such as The Beatles. Mr. Wervers doesn't rightly know why the community bands dwindled, but he points out that there are some that have survived for beyond 150 years.

It is gratifying to him, he said, that some of the members of the old Orangeville Citizens' Band have returned to play in this one.