



SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA

A BRIEF HISTORY

What is now the Kings Park Concert Band began in 1965 as the music committee of the Kings Park Civic Association? This beginning was Noteworthy because most community bands in the United States are sponsored by cities or towns and funded by taxes. At the time, Kings Park and Springfield were considered to be a long way out of "town". And many new residents wanted a nearby outlet for their musical talents. Members of the band were all volunteer amateur musicians. The conductor's position was also filled by a volunteer. The band rehearsed twice a month in the Community room over the Kings Park Hardware. A dance band (called the Kingsmen) was also formed with the requirement that all who played in the dance band had to play in the civic band.

By 1972, fifteen people would gather for a typical rehearsal. New members could join without audition. The band played three concerts each summer in the Kings Park Park by bringing in other musicians to fill out the sections. The county showmobile was rented for each concert and the audiences sat on the grass. The band also played for several parades by standing on the corner and playing as the parade passed. At Christmas, the band played outside each winner's house in the Kings Park decorations Contest. Some years the instruments froze and were defrosted in people's living rooms or under car heaters. Over the years, volunteer conductors included Robert Oppenheim, Jay Droz, Joe Lombardi, and Rima Vesilind.

In 1978 the concert band began to rehearse every week at Robinson Secondary school. Membership continued to grow, but it no longer overlapped with the dance band membership. The two groups decided to go their separate ways, and the Kingsmen became an independent organization that later split into two bands playing different kinds of jazz.

As the concert band expanded its concert schedule, music library, and percussion inventory, the need to hire a conductor soon became apparent. With the help of a state grant, Gar Whaley was hired as conductor.

To support the band financially, to provide a way to bring music to shut-in groups, and to play for special events, several ensembles were formed, again with the help of the state of Virginia. A small German band, brass ensemble, and saxophone quartet began performing for various holiday events and in nursing homes. However, the band's major source of support was the Kings Park Civic Association. Since membership in the civic association was voluntary, support for the band amounted to voluntary donations. The band continues to be supported today by donations from communities, businesses, and individuals.

In 1979, Maurice Williams, of Kings Park, was hired as conductor, and the band embarked on a full year-round performance schedule. Band members found themselves driving to parks all over northern Virginia, as well as Maryland and Washington, D.C. The schedule typically included fifteen full band concerts and ten to fifteen ensemble performances each year. Weather became a factor in the schedule because most concerts were played in open areas. One time the audience even held umbrellas over the band when rain started suddenly.

In 1980 the band reorganized and rewrote its constitution to formally recognize that it could no longer be considered the "music committee" of the Kings Park Civic Association. The band became a separate non-profit organization and was renamed the Kings Park Concert Band (formerly the king's park civic band) to reflect the broadened schedule of performances. The band wanted to keep the name of Kings Park in its name to honor the community who courageously formed and supported a band for community musicians. The traditional July 4th and Christmas performances in Kings Park, as well as concerts at civic association Meetings continued to be included in the concert schedule. Membership remained open, without audition, to adults who played in high school or college, and who wanted to continue playing on a competent amateur level.

The band's philosophy throughout its history has been based on a desire to play for everyone in the community by programming a wide variety of music, including light classics, marches, musical, novelties, rock, country, pops, and folk music. Concerts are free to the public, as they have always been.

The band's current conductor, John Pickeral, of McLean, Virginia, began his tenure in November, 1982. Through his selection of music and short talks to the audience, he helps increase their knowledge and appreciation of music.

The band's 1990 membership is about 50 men and women who come from all over northern Virginia and the District, and who have jobs in government, education, insurance, science, computers, child care, medicine, law enforcement, radio, and many more fields. All leave their other identities behind and gather every Tuesday. In fact, being a band member involves a significant commitment of time for practice, rehearsals, and performances all over the metropolitan area. Members of the Kings Park Concert Band are musicians who are serious about carrying on the American community band tradition.