

Strike up the band

By Heidi Carrier



You may be in the golden years of your life, but might there be something new on the horizon? If you have always wanted to learn to play an instrument (or haven't played for a long time but have fond memories of when you did), the New Horizons Band of Southeastern Connecticut—or one of the other community music ensembles in our region—may be a great option to get out and socialize, learn, and be a part of something that brings joy to your community.

Making music in an ensemble during the adult years of life offers many health benefits for body, mind, and spirit:

READING AND PERFORMING MUSIC CAN BE A CHALLENGING AND ENGAGING INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY

Reading pitches and rhythms, understanding key and time signatures, articulations, and expression provides new ways to better appreciate music. Learning the concepts of music and then using them in performance can be a rewarding challenge at any age and level of proficiency.

IMPROVE CONCENTRATION AND MEMORY

Making music requires a musician to be in the moment, keep their place in sheet music,

watch a conductor, and listen to what is happening around them. Every practice session offers opportunities to learn and build on past learning.

PHYSICAL COORDINATION IS DEVELOPED AND MAINTAINED

For singers, learning to breathe from your diaphragm allows you to support notes and develops a method of deep breathing that can also help to release tension in the body. A musician playing a wind instrument can develop a similar type of breathing but also coordinates this breath with the way they use their mouth and tongue to create sounds. They also use their posture and hand strength to support and change notes. For those who play using string instruments, keyboards, or percussion, posture and muscle strength in the hands and arms are invaluable.

A WORKOUT FOR MIND AND BODY IN CONCERT

Playing an instrument is one way to develop “muscle memory,” which is the ability to reproduce a particular movement without conscious thought, brought about by repetition. Individuals who haven't picked up their instrument for many years may be astonished by how quickly they can get back into playing. The coordination of the parts of the body that are active during

the performance of music require many complex brain functions. For those individuals who wish to stay cognitively sharp, playing an instrument can be a great brain booster.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Being a part of a music group is a great way to meet others in your local area with similar interests. Many lifelong friendships are forged while making music together. Performing at local venues is a rewarding venture—especially at nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities, and senior centers, to audiences who are appreciative of the gift of music. When you participate in community music with others from the same generation, there may be plenty of fond reminiscing about music hits and favorites from yesteryear.

A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Practicing alone and rehearsing with a group can bring a great sense of accomplishment. Practice makes perfect! Or, better said, practice leads to consistent improvement. Just like a youngster who is learning how to catch and throw a ball, a musician at any age who consistently practices will develop greater skill, endurance, and overall musicality. Some ensembles offer solo or small group opportunities, which is a chance to get plenty of encouragement from fellow musicians and put your skills in the spotlight!

If you're looking for groups to join in your area, one community music opportunity that is aimed specifically at the over fifty crowd (but is open to players of any age) is the New Horizons Band of Southeastern Connecticut, a chapter of the New Horizons International Music Association. This small concert band meets at the Noank Firehouse every Wednesday afternoon for camaraderie and music making in a wide variety of genres. These instrumentalists play woodwind, brass, percussion,

and keyboard instruments. Members range from complete beginners to intermediate players to more advanced players who enjoy mentoring those who are newer to ensemble performance. Many people say, “I haven't picked up my instrument for a long time,” and they are reassured that most New Horizons members come from a similar situation and go on to have a very rich and enjoyable experience. One benefit of New Horizons for retirees who have left the 9-to-5 daily grind behind them is that this group rehearses and performs during the day.

Trumpet player Vickie Fulkerson says, “My favorite performance is every time we play because we work so hard at it. We're not professionals, but we're steadfast, and we have guts! And because of the people in the band ...who have grown to be some of my best friends. And because of the people we play for who treat us like we're royalty because we've taken the time to come and play for them. The whole thing is so fulfilling and moving that I can't explain it. Coming back to it all these years later has changed my life so much.”

New Horizons is seeking to grow its membership and there are no auditions. Director Heidi Carrier says, “The goal of New Horizons is to have fun, challenge ourselves, and learn new things. I am excited to welcome any new musician and meet them where they are at, incorporating beginners and veteran players alike. For those folks who need to rent

an instrument, we can suggest some resources, as well as help you find a private teacher if you would like more one-on-one focus. This is a low-stress environment where it's ok to make a mistake and we enjoy laughing and sharing together. The official New Horizons music motto is, “Your best is good enough!”

Learn more about the New Horizons Band of Southeastern Connecticut by calling 860-456-7431 or visiting facebook.com/NewHorizonsBandSECT.



There are many community music opportunities in New London County and Southern Rhode Island. Here are a few to consider:

bands

Noank Mystic Community Band

www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100060887657178

Waterford Community Band

www.facebook.com/thewaterfordcommunityband/

Old Lyme Town Band

www.oldlymetownband.com/

Westerly Band

westerlyband-gov.doodlekit.com/

The Coastline Swing Band

www.coastlineswingband.com/

orchestras

Southeastern Connecticut Community Orchestra

www.seccorchestra.com

New London Community Orchestra

www.nlcommunityorchestra.org/

choruses

Mystic River Chorale

www.mysticriverchorale.org/

Eastern Connecticut Symphony Chorus

eastsymphony.com/chorus/

Stonington Madrigal Singers

www.calvarymusicsschool.org/stonington-madrigal-singers/



ABOVE New Horizons Band member Vickie Fulkerson has brought her passion for trumpet playing to new audiences by playing the national anthem at sporting events.



LEFT Mary Jean Hull (shown center in her purple band uniform shirt) plays her tenor saxophone while warming up for a joint concert of the New Horizons Band of Southeastern Connecticut and the New Horizons Band of the Community Music School, based out of Centerbrook, CT. In 2014 Mary Jean co-founded the New Horizons Band of Southeastern Connecticut.

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