



# Tooting Ensemble: Portland Symphony Orchestra and the Portland Public Schools

**C**ollaboration is the hottest buzzword in music education in the 1990s, says *Music Educators Journal*. In an era of increased demands and static school budgets, outside organizations are today assuming burdens traditionally borne alone by the schools. And *MEJ*, a nationally-circulated professional magazine, cites Portland Symphony Orchestra for its "Opening the Doors" partnership program with Portland Public Schools.

Now in its third year, Opening the Doors sends PSO artists into two schools, Lincoln Middle School and Portland High School, to supplement music programs by teaching small groups in band and orchestra. This project is underwritten by the Maine Arts Commission, the Portland School Department and the PSO.

The main component of the collaboration is a series of six sectional coaching sessions. Here students have the rare opportunity to work one-on-one with professional musicians. These sessions are once per week, January through February, with instrumental sections of the schools' bands and orchestras.

PSO musicians include clarinetist Thomas Parchman, trumpeter Betty Rines, timpanist Reggie Bonnin, violinist Susan Shipley and violist Meg Gillette. To fill in some gaps, the PSO has hired two outside musicians, flutist Deirdre Manning and saxophonist Barry Saunders. Laurie Schell, PSO director of education, coordinates. Participating PSO musicians "are chosen for their willingness and ability to communicate with the student, not by their seating [rank] in the orchestra," says Schell.

Others involved are school music teachers: Richard Randazzo, band leader at Portland High, Sylvia Infantine, orchestra leader at Lincoln and Audrey Jackman, band leader at Lincoln. Jackman herself also plays oboe with the Portland Community Symphony Orchestra.

The high point of the band program is the March 8 All-City concert, where all the school bands and orchestras participate. There is also a December holiday concert, a Memorial Day concert and several school band festivals around the state.

In mid-March, PSO maestro Toshiyuki Shimada visits each school and leads a session for the students, prior to their attending an orchestral concert. Shimada reviews the music program he has selected and presents collateral material regarding the music and musicians. Portland High students will attend the PSO's March 29 classical

concert. Lincoln students will attend the May 2 Youth Concert.

The PSO's assistance is sorely needed. The student/teacher ratio in the two schools ranges between 200:1 and 400:1 according to Schell. Lincoln's band — plus a separate wind ensemble, jazz ensemble and string orchestra — involves nearly 100 out of the school's total enrollment of about 500. The separate chorus program counts nearly 90 students. Two teachers, one for chorus and one for instrumentalists, handle the school's whole load on a part-time basis.

Sparkplug for the Lincoln band is director Audrey Jackman, a young music

prepare this story, about 60 band students, sixth through eighth graders, were divided into the following sections.

**Brass:** 10 trumpets, 5 trombones and 1 French horn, Betty Rines.

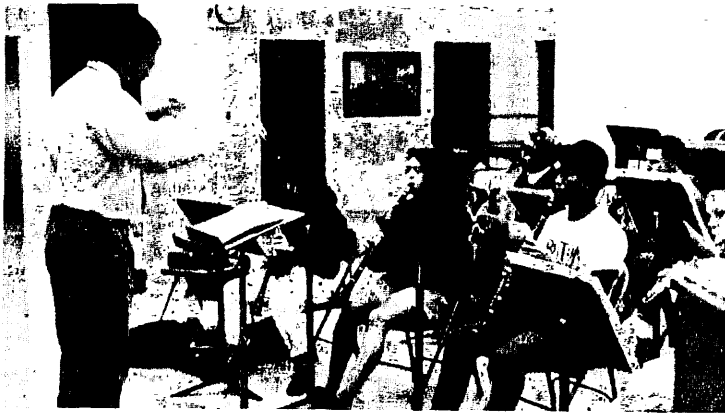
**Saxophones:** 14 total, Barry Saunders.

**Percussion:** 8 varied percussionists total, including bass drum, cymbals, snare drums, 2 xylophones and kettle drums, Reggie Bonnin.

**Flutes:** 14 total, Deirdre Manning.

**Clarinets:** 9 total, Tom Parchman.

I had time to spend about ten minutes each with four sectional classes. Some highlights:



Portland Symphony Orchestra principal clarinetist Tom Parchman, leads the clarinet section of the Portland High School Band. (Sue Danforth photos)

teacher whose teaching schedule is split between four middle schools: Lincoln, Longfellow, Hill and Baxter. Her primary duties are to teach the whole band at each school — "a huge heterogeneous group" is how she describes it. This is simply not enough to fully expand the students' capabilities and nurture their interests.

The Lincoln band is broken down into five sections and a PSO professional is assigned to each. Working with very small groups, PSO musicians are able to focus on individual students' needs, devoting considerable attention to detailed instruction in special topics such as tone, fingering, bowing and breathing. Additional attention is aimed at music for the All-City.

Teachers benefit too. The *Music Educators Journal* says, "Collaboration is an idea for the 1990s that allows education to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. Collaboration provides the music teacher who is normally surrounded by four walls and a continual sea of faces an opportunity to work with other teachers, community leaders, and administrators in improving instructional effectiveness and the art of teaching."

But the students are the main beneficiaries. They gain proficiency on their instruments plus an increased appreciation for their roles in the band. These roles mirror those in life.

The day I visited Lincoln school to

"\*HORNS UP!" called Betty Rines, "And count out the times. TWO-THREE-FOUR. Come in here." She demonstrates, first mistiming her entrance, then properly entering. A few minutes later, she stresses three key concepts: sharpness, distinctiveness and clarity of individual notes. Again, she demonstrates twice, once the wrong way and once the right way. Then she has her students run play a dozen bars three times. Each time sounds better and Rines specifically notes details of each improvement.

"\*Musical thoughts have to be communicated in a phrase, and you need to understand that phrase before you start to play," stresses Barry Saunders before his 14 young saxophonists. Tempo is not just a matter of speed. There's a difference between "fast — all tensed up" and "fast — with progressive movement."

"\*If you guys can't count, then the whole band's in deep, deep, trouble," laughs Reggie Bonnin, as he taps out rhythm and variations. Although he has the smallest group, it is the most diverse. Instruments range from variations on a theme of THUMP — the drums — to xylophones that can articulate melodies. One of his lessons this day: teaching each instrumentalist to play loudly or softly as the music calls for it — and not according to the player's mood.

\*Tom Parchman has a reticent group of



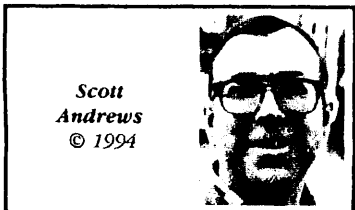
Portland Symphony Orchestra as principal trumpeter, Betty Rines, trumpet along with members of the section of the Portland High School

nine clarinetists, mostly girls. Their self-confidence is something he needs to on. One student has a problem getting sound whatever out of her instrument. "What's wrong?" asks Parchman. The student replies, hesitatingly, "It must be. Maybe I'm just stupid." Parchman reassures her. "No it's probably not probably the reed." Problem solved. This example to make a point about confidence. "You know, if a car won't start, there's something wrong and it to be fixed. But it doesn't mean you're stupid."

The bell concludes the class. Th Parchman's third year in the collaboration program and I ask him to list some observations. He offers several of the things I try to do is encourage students to ask questions, to feel okay asking questions, especially the questions you really can't ask in a big group."

He continues. "Giving them confidence and self-esteem is every bit as important as helping them finger a note or play a music." He compares this middle school class with his class at University of St. Maine — and observes that many of the requirements are the same. "I'm showing them the direction to go — a method of solving their musical problems as a series of steps. It's the same thing that I do with college students — just a different set of steps."

"When shown the best technique, students improve — and, more importantly, they see their own improvement, which supports and strengthens their confidence and feelings of self-worth. We show that the music is more than just notes on a page, and that everyone's unique contribution is valuable."



Scott Andrews  
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