



*Violinist Brian Holland of Framingham.*

Begun in January 2008 in Wayland, SVNHM is set up to appeal to the many adults who thought the chance to play with a musical group had passed them by. According to its website, the organization “is your entrance to the world of instrumental music ... for adults who love music and want to be involved playing music with others.” And, as it turns out, the group’s “best” is pretty darn good, says frequent concert attendee Julie Secord, director of the Wayland Council on Aging.

“The SVNHM band always delights our summer outdoor concert crowds!” Secord says. “It’s inspirational to think

that people who have never played an instrument or perhaps were a little rusty after not picking up their instrument for years team up with some already accomplished musicians to form this high-caliber musical family. SVNHM is a regional treasure.”

SVNHM is one of the 218 international chapters of New Horizons Music, which was started about 20 years ago by Dr. Roy Ernst in New York State to encourage adults – especially older adults – to realize their wish to make music. This Wayland chapter was founded by Sudbury resident Diane Muffitt, the current music director of SVNHM, after her brother in Michigan had a positive experience conducting a New Horizons band. Now retired after 38 years as a public school band director, the cheerful and energetic Muffitt was most recently band director at Wayland Middle School.

“When I started the band, I advertised to all the towns that touch Wayland. I expected to get maybe 20 people, but about 80 showed up to the first rehearsal. Now we have members from all over the

## It’s Never Too Late to Play Music

At Sudbury Valley New Horizons Music (SVNHM), their motto says it all: “Your best is good enough.” With a concert band and string orchestra that are open to all area adults – even people who have never played an instrument – SVNHM is committed to creating a musical environment that is non-competitive, non-intimidating, and fun.

Hugh Chandler, who at 84 is one of the band’s oldest members, is a clarinet player in the 65-member band. Before joining, Chandler had not played his instrument for nearly 70 years – not since junior high. He says that because of his age he is in a period of declining skills. “Sometimes I can’t play,” Chandler says. “But no one cares. I’m a member of the band. Period. The band’s motto isn’t just words.”



PHOTOS BY RUSS KEENE



area, including Sudbury, Concord, and Acton. We even have one band member who comes from South Lancaster,” says Muffitt.

Aishwarya Sarma joined the SVNHM string orchestra, which began in 2010, as a beginner violinist in 2013. At 28, she is the local chapter’s youngest member, by far. “Back in India,” says Sarma who is a pharmacist and scientist and lives in Framingham, “I always dreamed of playing the violin, but education was always more important, so I didn’t have the chance.”

When you attend a practice at Wayland Middle School with the band and the orchestra and watch them warm up, it becomes apparent that the great majority of members are 50 and above, a fact that Sarma cherishes. “I’m very proud to be part of this organization with its older people,” she says. “I admire them for their enthusiasm. It’s such a motivator to me. If they can do it, I can do it.”

The band and the orchestra both play two formal concerts a year at Wayland Middle School. They also play several concerts at area assisted living communities. Muffitt says the community and family members of the band really stand behind the organization and love to attend concerts. She notes “The groups play music at a variety of skill levels, from easy middle school level to music intended for adult musicians. No matter the level, the focus is on playing as musically as possible.”

According to Marjorie Keene of Sudbury, 72, who plays saxophone in the band, the concerts at the assisted living centers are especially rewarding. “We see what pleasure it brings to these people. They really appreciate it. They don’t care if we squeak.”

*left: Cellists Karen Fahmer and Diane Bladon, both of Wayland.*

*right: Jamie Clark conducts the SVNHM swing band.*

There are a number of other benefits to being a part of this organization, says Keene, a retired physical education teacher who returned to music after a 55-year absence. “It’s a wonderful feeling to play music with other people, especially when there’s not pressure to play perfectly.” She adds that she’s made many good friends there in the seven years she has been in the band.

Mary Beth Finch of Wayland, another band member who plays the flute, agrees. “I’ve met a lot of great people,” the 63-year-old says, “and I would not have met them in any other way. I am always in a better mood after practice.” She stresses that Muffitt also encourages group members to form smaller groups, like jazz ensembles or string quartets, so many people see their band friends more frequently than once a week.

Another benefit is that being in the band helps members appreciate music more. According to Weston’s Chandler, the band’s elder statesman who was previously a guidance director at Weston High School, “This has helped me really understand music and appreciate concerts. It’s widened my horizons.”

So, are you one of those people who listens to a concert and wishes you could play an instrument? Do you watch your child play an instrument and think it looks like fun? Muffitt says it’s easy to participate in the SVNHM band or the orchestra. If you already play an instrument or are returning to an instrument that you used to play, you may join anytime of the year. Beginners start only in

music

the fall, but Muffitt stresses that she can link you up with a private teacher or class if you want to start earlier. According to the website, "From the beginner classes, you will move into the novice group. Then, as you are ready, you will begin to play pieces with the intermediates." The only thing you need is an instrument, which you can buy or rent.

Muffitt notes there are fees of between \$145 and \$185 to participate in each multi-week session offered through the Wayland Recreational Department. (You can still sign up if you are from out of town.) This helps cover time with quality instructors. However, she stresses that no one is ever turned away if they can't afford the tuition. Sessions are offered in the fall and winter/spring. Summer music camp is also another popular option. Muffitt notes that if you are unsure of whether the orchestra or band is right for you, you can attend several practices free of charge and check it out.

Practices are held Wednesday evenings at Wayland Middle School. A day time band rehearsal for those who are unable to drive at night is also available.

Muffitt stresses that SVNHM is for everyone in our area. Why not give it a chance? ★

FOR MORE INFORMATION, see the SVNHM website at [www.svnhb.org](http://www.svnhb.org). Or, if you're interested in signing up, the best thing to do is to email Muffitt at [muffitt@svnhb.org](mailto:muffitt@svnhb.org) or call her at 978.261.5065.

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