

JUST FOR FUN

SENIOR BAND—CHRISTOS ASLANIDIS

“Ok, from the top. I’ll give you two bars.” Patricia Wheeler raises her baton. She’s the band director and teacher. She has a PhD in music and teaches at Centennial College and TMU. “Just follow the road map. Meet you at the end.” She counts us in, “One, two...one, two, three, four...” The baton comes down and we’re in. Our first notes are a bit tentative. It takes us a few bars, but we tighten up and the band sounds great. Here comes that first eighth note run. I nail it, and so do my section-mates. The saxes sound smooth, almost liquid, and the harmonies are sweet. There are four of us; two altos and two tenors. There used to be more, and we kind of dominated the band, but now, with the four, the blend is good. There is balance and breadth to the sound of the band. Boom, in come the trombones; deep, mellow, powerful, and then the trumpets soar over the top. I start to anticipate the upcoming part where the clarinets and flutes are featured. Their sound is smooth, delicate and rich. In

the middle of the tune, I feel the band is really “cookin’.”

I’ve been a member of New Horizons Band Toronto (NHBT) since before the pandemic; since before we got our sweet, new digs in a church basement at Victoria Park and Danforth. The SNI building is modern, spacious and meets all of our needs. And the sanctuary, upstairs, where we perform our concerts, is beautiful, with a high vaulted ceiling and plenty of sunlight which brings out the beauty of the natural wood beams and features of the room. It really feels great to perform in that room.

I figured that there would be a few retired teachers in the organization. In fact, there are lots. Several of the instructors are retired music teachers from Toronto and the GTA. What was really nice, was meeting people I knew from my days in the teaching biz. Two of them are in my band, Big Band II. (There is also a Big Band I.)

Susan Sturman, my section-mate and fellow alto sax player tells me how she

got involved with NHBT and what keeps her engaged.

“I started late in teaching, after several years working as a graphic artist and designer. I taught ESL, Computer Science, Drama, Special Education and Visual Arts. A teacher colleague of mine told me about New Horizons. She was playing alto saxophone, and I decided to try that instrument, too. I’d never played in a school band before, but the school where I taught was offering a night school course called Beginner Band, so I joined that class for a term to try alto sax. Once I tried playing the alto for that night school term, I decided I felt confident enough to join NHBT. I had previously played classical guitar and piano as a teenager, and played electric guitar in some rock and alternative bands in the 80s, but I hadn’t played any instrument for a long time before I joined New Horizons. I really missed playing music with people.

I’ve been a member of NHBT for 11 years.





Susan Sturman, alto sax player

I feel that I've learned a lot about music in general and have really had a chance to develop my skills in playing with others. I've enrolled in private lessons to improve my individual technique on the saxophone, but I get a chance to hear and understand the interplay of the different instruments in band. That's very exciting."

Another colleague from the TDSB, Anthony Irwin, tells me how he got involved with NHBT.

"NHBT used to practice in the basement of The Salvation Army building which is around the corner from my house. Walking my dog on warm days, I would hear music coming from the open windows. One day I asked someone leaving the building what it was all about. I joined shortly after. It was 2015.

I had taken clarinet lessons for a couple of years when I was a kid. Lucky for me, my parents had bought me an instrument. As a young adult I carried that clarinet with me as I traveled west across the country and then back to Toronto, always promising myself that I would start playing again. Every year or so I would make good on that promise and pull out my clarinet, play for an hour and then put it away for another year or so. When I retired I sudden-

ly had time and NHBT was close by. I started playing in the beginner band, then the concert band and then big bands. I really love playing jazz."

New Horizons Band Toronto is a music education and performance program for adults who wish to play a concert band instrument such as flute, saxophone and trumpet, in a friendly group setting. It also offers members the chance to experience the joy of singing with *Choir for All*, a mixed voice choir directed by Barry Peters.

NHBT is unique because it provides an opportunity for adults to learn how to play and sing without any prior musical experience. Classes ranging from absolute beginner to advanced levels are conducted by experienced, professional music directors. In-person classes are complemented by online classes and virtual band settings. Members can try out a band instrument for the first time or reconnect with an instrument they played years ago. NHBT also welcomes experienced musicians who want to play in a non-competitive setting. Classes are week days and evenings, depending on the band, and each class rehearses once per week.

Randy Kligerman, President of NHBT says, "It's different from a community band, because our music directors take the time to teach technique, theory, musical history, and musicianship. We also believe that the social component plays an essential role in your musical education. In 2010 we started with one band of 18 people, and we now have approximately 170 members spread over five levels of concert bands, two levels of jazz bands, and a variety of small ensembles. In our 15 years of operation we have enriched the mental, physical and social lives of several hundred people through music, and I am very proud of that."

Judy, our drummer, is driving the

rhythm section, a stand-up bass, keyboard and electric guitar. She's keeping us tight. All of the soloists were great with unique, interesting variations on the melody. We're coming up to the end. They say an audience will forgive a weaker performance as long as the ending is good. We don't need that. The tune has been rocking. We drive to the last four quarter note blasts, double forte. Then the final whole note. Patricia's baton is in the air, holding us there in a glorious sustained chord ending the tune. The baton drops down and we're out. There is a brief moment of silence followed by an eruption of applause and even some cheers. Patricia smiles at us.

We played a really good concert.

Christos Aslanidis taught English and Drama for 19 years, then served for 14 years as Executive Officer and Vice President of OSSTF Toronto. Retired in 2015, he currently plays alto sax in the NHBT.

Find on more information on [New Horizons Band Toronto](https://www.newhorizonsbandtoronto.ca/)



Anthony Irwin, clarinet