

# The Eastern Wind Symphony, where TCNJ alums play for fun



Since he joined the College music department in 1982, Assistant Professor William H. Silvester, had never been keen about starting a community orchestra, although the idea had been floated many times by alumni and others.

Convinced a typical community orchestra would inevitably attract “a lot of old codgers who hadn’t played for years and probably would never meet the standard I would want,” he repeatedly declined requests to direct such an ensemble. “I just couldn’t bring myself to smile that much,” is how he put it.

But a number of alumni persisted, many of them former students who by then were teaching music in the public schools and who missed the orchestral challenge they enjoyed in college. When it was agreed everyone would have to audition for membership, and that only the very best in wind and percussion literature would be performed, Silvester came around and the Eastern Wind Symphony (EWS) was born in 1996.

Seven years have passed and today the ensemble, about 65 percent of whose members are TCNJ grads, is widely recognized as one of the premier symphonic bands in America. At a typical concert about 50 members will perform, while 30 more are either on leave or otherwise temporarily unavailable.

In 2002, the EWS formally became a chapter of TCNJ’s Alumni Association, joining nursing, political science, and other alumni groups. As a result it enjoys an



annual infusion of about \$1,000 to help support its activities. Ticket sales from its three or four concerts per year, recording contracts, sales of its own CDs and an occasional paid appearance keep the band in what its secretary-treasurer, Robert Bonitz, calls a “completely solvent” condition.

Bonitz is not a TCNJ grad. He studied music and business in college, became a general contractor, but never lost his love for the alto saxophone. He learned of the band from other musicians, auditioned, and has been a regular for several years. He’s like 18 to 20 others who have no connection with the College, but find great satisfaction rehearsing and playing with other strong musicians. Typical of these is David Weinstein, a Bristol-Myers Squibb chemist who grew up in California but now lives in West Windsor with his wife and two children. He says his main personal outlet is playing clarinet in the EWS with others like **George Balog ’70**, an adjunct professor of music at TCNJ. Balog taught many EWS members and is the assistant director of the band.

By far, most members are TCNJ alumni who are music educators, many of them leading ensembles of their own. **Julia “Jules” Haran ’89**, who came back to TCNJ for her master’s in 1998, is one. She now directs the Hillsborough High School band, and keeps track of the EWS membership through section leaders to make sure enough oboes and flutes are there when needed. Trombonists **Frank Zintl** and his wife, **Carrie Lansberry**, both graduated in 1996. Today he teaches instrumental music and directs the band at a middle school in Pemberton, while she’s the music teacher at an Eatontown elementary school. They look forward to the rehearsals where, Frank says, “we can play with professionals at a high level of proficiency. It’s very satisfying and fun. We get to see our college friends, meet others, network, and talk shop with people from all over. After a rehearsal, we’ll often go out to Wildflowers for a drink.”

Frank credits director Silvester with making it all worthwhile. He says Silvester runs a tight ship, and expects the same of all EWS players that he does as a professor; that is, to know their parts before the rehearsal and to show up early.

Expenses are very low because none of the members is paid and all foot their own travel costs. Annually (except for 2003, when it was snowed out), EWS does a benefit concert to support an Eric L. Maybury Scholarship fund, named for a highly popular 1997 graduate, who was a distinguished saxophonist and promising music teacher when he died of cancer in 1999. In February, the fund stood at \$10,223.



The College gives EWS free use of its rehearsal space and, for performances, the Music Building Concert Hall, with all its lighting, recording, and other equipment. It also manages (for a fee) ticket sales for concerts on campus. In return, the College music program benefits from sheet music paid for by the EWS and later used for teaching purposes. The College also enjoys having the TCNJ name linked with the ensemble as it spreads good will among appreciative audiences throughout New Jersey and beyond.

EWS has recorded three commercial CDs: *Symphonic Images* (1998), *Symphonic Collage* (2002), and *Music in the Air* (2002). A fourth will be produced in August by Klavier Music, and recorded by Bruce Leek, whose clients have included The Beatles and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The CDs are available from the band’s Web site, [www.easternwindsymphony.org](http://www.easternwindsymphony.org) or [www.klavier-records.com](http://www.klavier-records.com).

Another measure of the band’s quality is that each year it is engaged by Masters Music Publications to record new works or new arrangements for symphonic and marching bands. These CDs are not available for purchase, but are sent free to hundreds of band directors around the world to illustrate the music the publisher has for sale. It is no minor boost to the pride of Silvester and his EWS players to know their Ewing sounds are being played for professional use from here to Tokyo, Vienna, and beyond.

Strictly speaking, the EWS is independent of the College, and is run by a small board of directors consisting of Silvester, Bonitz, and perhaps 10 others. They have hired a consultant to help them decide how to improve the band’s visibility. Its 2004 plans include two more recording sessions, spring concerts in Camden and at TCNJ, a November 28 concert at the College and a December 11 appearance at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark. Next year EWS will resume its Young Artist Competition and expects to bring world-renown flutist Paula Robison to campus for a week of performances and master classes.

Silvester and the board are trying to make the EWS even more of a household word in the state. They hope to show up at more major community events to build a broader base of support. After all, they say, playing good music is always fun, but it’s a lot nicer before an enthusiastic audience.

*Bruce B. VanDusen*

