

## Some Recollections of the Instrumental Music Program

### El Cerrito H.S. 1967-1977

A word about the schedule starting in 1967. There were two bands, a jazz band and an orchestra. To make up five periods of teaching, I was assigned two periods for the Symphonic Band as long as the enrollment for the class was kept above 60 or 30 students per class period. The Symphonic Band was scheduled into 4<sup>th</sup> period (lunch was periods four and five.) Therefore all members of the band had fifth period lunch. As much as possible all other music students, ie orchestra, concert band and jazz band were scheduled into fifth period lunch also. This allowed great flexibility for having sectional rehearsals as well as marching band, pit orchestra, full orchestra, small ensembles, etc. Those students who were not in Symphonic band and met during their lunch period grew quite adept at eating and playing at the same time! (The only drawback was the I had my lunch either third period (middle of the morning) or sixth period (middle of the afternoon.)

### Marching Band

The marching band was a student run organization with the mission of performing at all home games in uniform and on the field. I had an arrangement with the coaches that the band would be at the games regardless of the win/loss record of the team. There was a halftime committee that would come up with ideas for each halftime show, both formations and music. The marching band season ended with the last game of the season. The band also played at some of the away from home games as a “pep band”, only in the stands and not in uniform.

The rehearsals for the marching band were everyday during the lunch hour and on Tuesday nights under the lights. The band was also responsible for making a paper sign placed on a large frame that the football players ran through at the beginning of each game. (The sign usually represented the nasty things the Gauchos would do to the other team.)

One of the things the band did well was the pregame show which was the same each week. I would coordinate with the coaches on time and the band would enter from the west end zone and march to the middle of the field, then make the letters E C. Here the band would play the fight song followed by the National Anthem. Then the band would form a tunnel with the sign at the head for the players to run through, then exiting in two lines quickly right on time for the game to start.

Because they did not get a break until after halftime, one of the traditions was to have a couple of boxes of apples available to eat during the first half. One of my responsibilities on game day was to pick up the apples from a local grocery store.

One of the highlights for the band the first two years, 1967 and 68, was performing a halftime show at one of the Oakland Raiders games at the Oakland Coliseum. An amusing incident (though it was not amusing at the time) occurred at the start of the show. The band entered from the end zone and two key spots for lining up were the two “hash marks”

Nobody realized that the hash marks in pro ball were closer together than in high school or college. All of a sudden I heard cries of anguish –“the hash marks are not in front of me!” The only thing I could say was GO! and do the show anyway.

One of the performances that occurred in the fall was the Halloween parade at Harding school, an elementary school two blocks from El Cerrito. The band lined up in the street, marched to the school and then led the parade around the Harding playground. The elementary students thought this was just great to have a “real” marching band lead their parade.

While the marching band season ended with the last football game there were exceptions two times in the ten year period when the band went to Disneyland. The first time was the best because it was new, but the thrill the band and I had when they stepped off coming out by the Lincoln show theatre onto Main Street which was lined with people was unforgettable.

### Other Recollections

Musically speaking, there were some real “horses” at El Cerrito during this period and that enabled us to perform some outstanding pieces. Among these were Rhapsody in Blue, a violin and a piano concerto, the Bach Double Concerto, the third and fifth Brandenburg Concertos and the Vaughn Williams Serenade to Music with choir, orchestra and adult soloists. I am an organist, so one concert was at my church, 1000 Oaks Baptist in Berkeley, where we did the Haydn Organ Concerto with music supervisor Doug Kidd conducting. Also the orchestra performed a cello concerto with one of the cellists in the orchestra.

One of the students, Jim Underwood showed an outstanding ability for composition, so in his senior year he was given an independent study period and one of the pieces he wrote was for orchestra and choir entitled The Road with the words from the Frost poem “The Road Not Taken”. This was performed at graduation with Jim conducting. He got a standing ovation from his class. Jim went on to study composition as what was then Hayward State where he earned the BA and MA, then his doctorate from Indiana University.

A highlight of the year was the annual musical. The drama teacher was Peg Long and she was outstanding in this area and it was a real pleasure as well as an educational experience working with her. Some of the musicals we did with a full pit orchestra were Carousel, Finian’s Rainbow, Kiss Me Kate, Oliver, and South Pacific. In 1976 we performed George M for its patriotic message. KGO Channel 7 TV had a program to show off high school musicians and El Cerrito was selected to present a couple of scenes from George M. After recording the music inside, we went to the Conservatory building in Golden Gate Park where we were filmed outside, playing and singing along with the prerecorded music. One amusing incident occurred during Kiss Me Kate. There was a free standing tall flat stage right that the chorus entered by. One night someone hit the flat as they went by and it came forward and landed on the top of the grand piano in the

pit. No one was hurt and the next night the pianist and the two cellists who sat by the piano came wearing hard hats.

The musicals were a great opportunity for the drama, choral, and instrumental students to work together.

Each spring the Symphonic Band would make a tour of four elementary schools in the feeder area of El Cerrito and present a half-hour concert at each school, three in the morning and one in the afternoon. For lunch we would stop at a park so the students could let off some steam. We would alternate each year between schools on the “flat lands” and those in the hills. It was interesting that when we went to MLK park in downtown Richmond, this was a new experience for the students who lived in the hills, while the year when we had lunch at Arlington Park in Kensington, this was a place the “flat landers” had never been to. This was a small attempt at integration.

The concerts of the instrumental groups were held in the Little Theater, the cafeteria or the gym. We would have died to have the facility that El Cerrito now has.

Each year the jazz band went to the Reno Jazz festival and usually did very well.

A highlight of this ten year period was a band marathon to try to get in the Guinness Book of World Records. The goal was 80 hours and was done on a weekend when Friday was a holiday so it could go from Thursday afternoon through Sunday evening. The band took over the gym and had rooms for sleeping and eating (thanks to the band parents for providing meals.) The rules state that 75% of the group music be playing at any time and that a break may be taken for 10 minutes each hour. We pulled out all of the easy music books that could be played without rehearsal and had at it. We offered an opportunity for persons to “guest” conduct the band on a number and had many who did so. Unfortunately, we did not make the Record Book, another band had their marathon at the same time and went a little longer. The local newspaper did a feature with pictures of the event and Associated Press picked it up and put it on their wire service. This went world wide and not long after we got a copy of the English newspaper in Hong Kong with a picture of the El Cerrito band on the front page!

This ten year period was an outstanding one for El Cerrito instrumental music and I certainly have fond memories of that time.