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LAPD Band

by Christina Challey

“The Happiest Place on Earth” is where, in 1972, at the age of 20, LAPD Band member Bob Burstein began his journey with the musical family at Disneyland. If you happened to be walking down Main Street USA and heard the Disneyland Band, you may have seen Bob—he was the one with the tuba! Or you may have seen him conducting the band in front of Fantasyland.

Bob grew up in Van Nuys, Calif., with supportive parents who always encouraged his musical endeavors. He began playing violin in second grade, but changed his musical direction when, at age 13, he went to the Rose Parade and saw all the marching bands. That’s when his interest changed to brass instruments. When he started junior high school, he wanted to play the trumpet like everyone else. But because there weren’t enough trumpets available, he settled for the tuba, which meant he had to, along with his school books, carry it home, without a case, for over a mile! He did manage to get a ride back to school the next morning.

As his school years went by, Bob added the trombone and the string bass to his musical instrumentation. He played in many community bands and orchestras, honor groups, a Dixieland band and a brass quintet. Bob even organized a band of his fellow Little Leaguers to play for the opening-day ceremony of their baseball season. To the surprise and delight of the parents in the stands, the band played the Star Spangled Banner and various marches.

Bob spent several summers at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Mich., and during his senior year, graduated from their Arts Academy. He then went on to major in Music Performance and Education at the University of Southern California. It was during these first years at USC when he began to sub for various musicians in the Disneyland Band. Then, in 1972, he auditioned for and was hired as a full-time musician in the band. This meant, in order to take the job, he would have to withdraw from USC. He decided to leave college, and he said, “It turned out to be the right

decision, not only for the opportunity to play professionally in a wide variety of musical styles, but also because it led me on a path to play as a freelance musician in a number of settings including shows, ballroom dances, musicals, opera, Dixieland and many others.”

Bob has also spent many years being involved with the Musicians Union. He was on the Board of Directors of Local 7 in Orange County. He served as the musicians’ shop steward at Disneyland and participated in many labor contract negotiations.

Bob says he contributes his successful career to the continued support of his parents, excellent teachers and mentors, and “liberal doses of good timing, good luck and several opportunities.” He said that to pay it forward, he has begun mentoring college students and has become involved in their quest to emerge as professional musicians.



Bob with the Disneyland Dixieland Band.

Bob spends lots of time outdoors exploring National Parks and likes to vacation during the “fall color season.” He enjoys sports and collecting a few antiques. As a member and assistant conductor of the LAPD Band, Bob said, “It has been a pleasure to become affiliated with a unique and important part of the Los Angeles Police Department.”

For more information about the Band, please contact Jim Starr, executive director: sngcop@aol.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapolicyfoundation.org, and in the “comments box,” put “for the Band.” ❖

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