

Band fills the hills with music

By IFAN PAYNE
Music Critic

The hills were alive with the sound of music as Margean Harshbarger sang the solo of the same name with the Manhattan Municipal Band on Tuesday evening. Ms. Harshbarger exemplifies the abundance of talent in the community, as indeed does the band itself.

This was my first opportunity to hear the band this summer and its concert in celebration of Flag Day was as entertaining as the singing of Marjean Harshbarger was attractive.

The sound of the band is full-bodied with the bass and upper-bass sounding particularly rich. Perhaps the space of the pavilion has an effect upon the characteristic sound of the group, perhaps it is just the tonal richness of the lower half of the instruments...whatever the cause, it sounds good.

The other notable aspect of the band's performance under the direction of Larry Norvel is the precision and crispness of attack and ensemble. This may only be a pick-up group, but watching and hearing the responsiveness of the players it is clear that what it has picked up is a great deal of individual experience in

its players.

It is a pleasure to hear and see an ensemble that is led by a director who is a technically accomplished conductor, he has his players right *there* at the point of the stick...there is no dragging by the players and no smudged entries and given the very limited rehearsal time most of the works performed have a shape and a liveliness that forces attention. These characteristics are usually those of efficient and effective rehearsals.

Given that limited rehearsal time there are of course bloopers and wrong notes to be heard, but there is also a great deal that is musically satisfying and technically accomplished and my impression is that the band has more dynamic nuance and responsiveness this year, as though the players seem to be a little more willing to play softly when necessary.

All these aspects could be heard during the performance of Von Suppe's *Poet and Peasant Overture*: staccato notes were crisply attacked, dotted and double dotted rhythms were precise and Mike Gaches' trumpet solo was secure and lyrical. On the other hand, a moment like the first transition into the $\frac{3}{4}$ time section left the flutes and clarinets cruelly exposed, but the waltz that followed had a nice lilt and swing to it.

Frank Sidorfsky was the featured

clarinet soloist in Adolf Schreiner's *Immer Kleiner*, which is exactly what his instrument became. The work could also have been entitled *All Change Keys*.

I wish that the band pavilion were a more comfortable setting, and I wish that just once we could hear what the group could do after a week's rehearsal and what it would then sound like in McCain Auditorium for there were many moments when the security and precision of the playing and the competence of the conducting were a real pleasure to hear and there are moments, as during the built-in encore *Americans We*, an old favorite, when the band just motored on by itself to great effect and even the weaker sections sounded good.

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