

SPARTANBURG

Mecca for Strings

BY BILL SCOTT



A recent article in the *Music Educators Journal*, "How are We Doing?" by M.E.N.C. President Paul Lehman, gave the discouraging statistic that public high school orchestras have attracted an average of 0.7 percent of the available school population. In Spartanburg, South Carolina, however, the District 7 Orchestra Program has over 800 string students, representing 13 percent of the student population in grades 5-12. The 164 students who participate in one of the two orchestras

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tras at Spartan High School represent 8 percent of the total school enrollment. There are several factors that contribute to the success of this string program.

String instruction, which begins in the fifth grade, is scheduled during the school day. Each elementary school string class meets for 40 minutes twice a week. We limit beginning classes to a group of 20 pupils studying all four string instruments. Though we could advance the students more quickly with upper strings in one class and lower strings in another, having friends in class together is an important incentive to join the orchestra. Mixed classes also result in a more balanced instrumentation. At the sixth-grade level, students from all nine elementary schools have the opportunity to audition



for the Elementary Honors Orchestra, which meets on Saturday mornings. The emphasis of this ensemble is on developing musicianship, recognizing conducting patterns, becoming aware of independent parts within the ensemble, and improving intonation.

At the junior high level, mixed string classes meet for an hour five days a week. One junior high school has such a large orchestra enrollment that we have to schedule two periods of strings

for each grade level. One of them is designated an honors class. A general rehearsal is held once a week after school for 60 to 90 minutes.

In high school the string classes give way to performing orchestras. The Symphony Orchestra rehearses before school every morning from 7:30 to 8:05. The 101 students then report to homeroom, and the string section returns to rehearse during first period. String students receive a full credit and wind students receive half a credit for participation. Wind students are not required to play in the band, although they are encouraged to do so. Beginning next year, 10th-grade wind students accepted into the orchestra will be required to play in the concert band but will be excused from marching. The Spartan High Concert Orchestra (the second orchestra) meets for an hour five days a week.

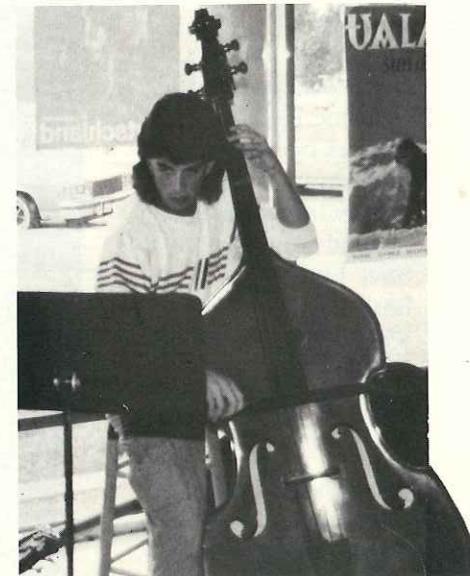
The same six full-time string faculty members instruct students in the elementary schools through the junior high level. This teaching concept continues through high school. Every Wednesday five of the six faculty members conduct sectionals with the Symphony and Concert Orchestras. They take great pride in knowing that they have helped develop a particular section of the orchestra, especially when they attend an orchestra concert and are recognized by students, colleagues, and parents.

Students attach considerable prestige to being accepted into the Spartanburg High School Symphony Orchestra. The major concerts are televised by the local cable television station, which gives the performers an opportunity to observe and critique themselves both in terms of how they sound and how they look.

All 10 of the district orchestras travel and perform on concert tours. The Elementary Honors Orchestra tours the elementary schools in the fall and the spring. At the junior high level, the or-

chestras are limited to performing for groups within Spartanburg County, such as clubs, homes for the elderly, and mall concerts. The high school Concert Orchestra is allowed one overnight trip each year. It might be an exchange concert with another school or a music festival in a neighboring state. The high school Symphony Orchestra performs at major conventions and music festivals. In the past they have appeared at the Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston and the Mid-West National Band and Orchestra Clinic in Chicago. Every three years members of both the Symphony Orchestra and the Concert Orchestra are invited to participate in an international concert tour. Past tours have included Western Europe, Greece and Rumania, and the British Isles.

University orchestra programs actively recruit our string stu-



dents. In 1986, 34 seniors graduated from the Symphony Orchestra. Of these, one is pursuing a career in music, and 24 plan to continue playing their instruments in college. Universities from as far away as Texas, Boston, and Miami come to Spartanburg to audition string students.

We often receive phone calls from university professors offering to play concertos with the Symphony Orchestra, but our policy is to limit soloists to members of the orchestra. Last spring

I divided the 102-member ensemble in half and ran split rehearsals with assistant conductor Paul Buyer. The result was a concerto program featuring 12 soloists.

After hearing the Greater Twin Cities Youth Orchestra perform the "Meditation" from Massenet's *Thaïs* with several soloists at the Mid-West National Band and Orchestra Clinic, we decided to give the idea a try in Spartanburg. Other works that we have programmed with multiple soloists include Borowski's "Adoration," Monti's "Czardas," the Telemann Viola Concerto, Adagio and Allegro for Double Bass by Galliard, and "The Swan" and "The Elephant" from Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*. There is indeed strength in numbers, and many students are eager to play solo literature when included in a group. It is also an excellent way to improve an entire section of the orchestra.

The Chamber Orchestra func-

lege Music Department, we have two double bass ensembles, and one cello choir. Some of our advanced students also play in the Spartanburg Symphony, a volunteer civic orchestra.

Students are encouraged but not required to take private lessons on their instruments. In the 1985-86 school year, 80 percent of the symphony string members received private tutoring. A high percentage of these students realize a return on their investment in private instruction. Scholarships of up to \$800 have been awarded to 37 percent of the symphony strings for study at summer music camps. Last spring 25 orchestra students received scholarships for private study from the Converse Pre-College Music Department. Nearly 40 high school students teach private music lessons to fifth and sixth-grade string students, for which they are paid seven dollars an hour. Principal players from

gram is the literature we play. During the past seven years we have programmed 52 works from the major orchestral repertoire. These include overtures, symphonies, concertos, incidental music, and selections from ballets. Last spring, for example, the Symphony Orchestra presented a program consisting of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings*, Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*, the first movement of the Vivaldi Piccolo Concerto, Liadov's *Polonaise*, and the *Russian Easter Overture* of Rimsky-Korsakov. Of course, we also play our share of light music at the pops and children's concerts, but the students respond to the classics and expect to play them.

There are many facets to the success story of the Spartanburg Strings Program: parental support; a culturally sophisticated community with a history of supporting the arts; outstanding music educators; student commitment to excellence; and administrative support.

The school district provides a generous budget for what they consider to be a worthwhile program. Funds are allocated for new music, instrument purchases, repairs, transportation, contest fees, recording fees, and even concert hall rental. We have no orchestra booster club; any fund raising done by the students is administered by the orchestra faculty. Every year the students participate in a citrus sale, through which they earn credit toward the cost of the international concert tour, which is not funded by the district.

A few years back, during a period of budget cuts, the assistant superintendent called me to his office to ask if there was anything that could be cut from the orchestra budget without damaging the program. This illustrates the kind of encouragement the orchestra has received from the school administration for the last 66 years. When I read articles like the one that asks "How Are We Doing?" I can honestly say that support from the top has helped to make the difference. □



The Honors Quintet at the Governor's Mansion

tions as an arts outreach program to bring the string program to the attention of the public. The repertoire of the 30-member orchestra consists of light pops arranged for strings, piano, and drum set. Most of the civic clubs in Spartanburg have been introduced to District 7's string program by the Chamber Orchestra. Through the Converse Pre-Col-

lege Chamber Orchestra form an Honors Quintet, which accepts paying engagements at parties, weddings, banquets, and receptions. Ultimately a large percentage of our students are awarded music scholarships by colleges and universities, regardless of their major.

The single most important motivating factor in the string pro-