



A Tribute to Ralph Buck

(This article was published at the Bonsal Blues Concert a few weeks ago in Honor of our own Ralph Buck and we wanted to share with our CBC Family)

Tonight's concert is dedicated to Ralph Arthur Buck, Sr., a valued member of the Bonsal Blues Family and trumpet section since 2005. Ralph started coming out to the Bonsal Blues to play along with his daughter, Debbie Buck (flute), and his granddaughters, Sine (trumpet) and Elyse (percussion). He resides in Woodbury with his wife Emily, an accomplished violinist. Many musicians have come through the Bonsal Blues in our 70+ year history, but no one has come close to having the distinguished professional career as Ralph.

Ralph, born January 23, 1937, started playing trumpet when his brother switched to playing tuba because the school band needed a tuba player.

When he was in elementary school the music director of Vineland High School drove to pick him up from school so he could play in the High School band and orchestra. He played 1st trumpet over the high school members.

Ralph played in both the All State Orchestra and All State Band all 4 years that he was in High School. In 1954, his senior year in high school, he auditioned and played 1st trumpet in the All Eastern orchestra. The All Eastern orchestra was based in Boston.

While in high school Ralph worked on an oyster research ship called the Nelson out of Port Norris. If his music career had not flourished Ralph would likely have enjoyed a life at sea. After high school he was awarded a scholarship to Valley Forge Junior College as a member of the band. He attended Valley Forge from 1955 to 1956.

In 1956 he competed with candidates on a world-wide scale and was one of the only two trumpet players accepted at the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

While at Curtis he studied with Samuel Krauss who was the principal trumpet player for the Philadelphia Orchestra. Through Mr. Krauss he was hired as a substitute trumpet player for the Philadelphia Orchestra while he was a student at Curtis. He graduated in 1960.

After graduation he became the first chair trumpet player for the Pennsylvania Ballet orchestra. He continued to play with the Ballet orchestra until 2015. He was also the first call substitute for the Philadelphia Orchestra. He began making recordings with the orchestra under the direction of Eugene Ormandy and later Riccardo Muti. Ralph made over 25 recordings with the orchestra from the 1960's to 1990's. At that time Ralph was also the first chair trumpet player for both the Lyric Opera and the Grand Opera in Philadelphia. He began playing in the Ocean City Pops summer concerts under the direction of Clarence Fuhrman in 1960 until the mid-1970's. Ralph gave up the his summers in Ocean City to play the summer season with the Philadelphia orchestra at the Robin Hood Dell, later the Mann Center, and Saratoga Springs in upstate New York.

Ralph played in the pit orchestras for many musical shows including the 1971 revival of "No No Nannette" on Broadway in New York City, "Mame" in New York City and Philadelphia, "Les Miserables" in New York City and Philadelphia, "Cats" in Philadelphia, and "Phantom of the Opera" in Philadelphia and numerous shorter run musicals in the Philadelphia area.

Ralph's tours with the Philadelphia Orchestra include South America, China, Korea and two tours to Europe. Ralph also traveled with a musical touring company out of New York City. Productions included "Peter Pan" with Sandy Duncan, "On Your Toes", "Cats", and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat" with Donny Osmond.

In the 1970's Ralph played at Palumbo's Nightclub in Philadelphia where he accompanied acts such as the Mills Brothers, Bobby Garrett, Jimmy Durante, and Paul Anka. He also played the Steel Pier in Atlantic City with Paul Anka. Other greats that he accompanied include Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo in the 1980s. He was regular with many local bands and orchestras including the Westminster Brass at the 1st Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, Friends of the Philadelphia Orchestra at Haddonfield Methodist Church, Brass choirs at Haddonfield Methodist Church, and Philadelphia Pop's with Peter Nero to name just a few.

As a freelance trumpeter Ralph has escorted many a blushing bride (musically) down the aisle. Ralph can also be seen playing with the band in the movie "Beloved" starring Oprah Winfrey.

Although Ralph's professional career was going strong when he first came to the Bonsal Blues he still found time to be one of our most dedicated members. During the busy Christmas seasons working six nights a week with the Pennsylvania Ballet, Ralph would use his one off night on

Mondays to play rehearsals and Christmas Concerts with the Bonsal Blues. Always modest, Ralph never sought the limelight or attention while playing with the Bonsals, but always obliged when he was asked to perform a solo. In 2011 Ralph was presented the John Philip Sousa Award for his service to the band. Even after suffering a severe stroke in 2015 which left Ralph with limited mobility and minimal use of his right hand, he can still be seen playing regularly with the Bonsal Blues Band.

Ralph Buck is an outstanding asset to the Bonsal Blues Band. We are truly privileged and honored to have Ralph as a member of the Bonsal Blues Family.

