

Music Teacher Credits Whitefield Roots for His Success

By Lucy L. Martin

Dwight Tibbetts, born and raised in Whitefield, has had a lot of help getting to where he is today and he's eager to share the credit.

Most recently, the lanky, intense Augusta middle school music teacher and band director sold 20 arrangements to a California based company that specializes in publishing brass music.

Tibbetts, 46, started playing trumpet as a teen and before that, studied piano. A thick ringbinder holds arrangements he has done over the years, including Israeli dances, Irish ballads, music from "The Lion King" and many other compositions.

He converts medleys of songs such as "Mack the Knife", "My Way", "Love and Marriage" into five brass parts to create "Tribute to Sinatra". Other selections make up "Salute to Bob Hope". Classical, country, popular music: it's all there and some of it will be published by Solid Brass Music Company, which Tibbetts discovered while surfing the Internet.

The Whitefield native and wife Marianne, also a music teacher, have three children and live in Windsor. Dwight has written a lot of gospel music and belonged to the Manchester Brass quintet before starting Downeast Brass last year.

He is currently working on Edward Grieg's Piano Sonata in E minor, opus 7. "Grieg has never been done for brass and Solid Brass Music Co. is publishing it," he said excitedly. "Grieg sounds beautiful in brass!"

While the success is sweet, Tibbetts takes as much pleasure in just making music and encouraging kids, who may never have played an instrument before, to jump in and have fun.

He started his career at Augusta's Cony High School in 1980 and by 1983 "I had 100 people in a marching band, not an A-plus band but a lot of people learned music and had fun! Isn't that what it's all about - fun with music?"

Tibbetts gives credit to teachers and Whitefield neighbors for giving him a leg up. He knew from an early age that "music picked me, I didn't pick it." He remembers milking cows on the family dairy farm and having melodies that wouldn't stop in his head. "I was hooked as soon as I climbed up on a piano stool," he recalled of his first lesson as a 7th grader with local



teacher Esther Hallowell.

The boy was actually snagged a bit earlier when his 4th grade teacher Robert Souvigny taught him guitar. And a generous neighbor, the late Marguerite Prescott, gave him money for his first guitar (and shared her encyclopedia set with all six of Don and Bea Tibbetts' children).

Dwight later studied with jazz guitarist and composer Tom Hoffman, formerly of Jefferson. "He was a big influence. He really helped me and was one of the biggest reasons I studied at University of Maine in Augusta." There the eager young musician earned an associate's degree in jazz performance to complement his B.S. in music education from University of Southern Maine in 1980.

Prior to that, "I was always writing and arranging for shows," Tibbetts said of his years at Wiscasset High School.

And that's another debt. "If it hadn't been for Helen Chase, who worked in Wiscasset, I would have gone to Erskine Academy," which didn't have a music program at the time. "She said she'd drive me. My freshman year I borrowed her son, Dick Chase's, trumpet. If it wasn't for them I'd probably still be milking cows."

Playing trumpet with no training for the high school band "was tough going. I was put into the situation of being the weakest band member. But I worked hard and by my sophomore year, I was first," he said. As a result of this experience, Tibbetts said, he allows time in his schedule with middle school students "to teach new kids. The best way is to start young, but it's never too late."

Dwight remembers his grandmother, Gladys Tibbetts, playing an upright piano when he was little. "She could read music and play by ear, too," and he has cousins on his mother's side of the family who play with the Portland Symphony Orchestra. His cousin's son plays for the Metropolitan Opera. Tibbetts' own son Ben, 13, has studied piano since kindergarten, writes his own compositions and tackles everything from Mozart sonatas to "Rhapsody in Blue" on the baby grand in his bedroom.

Reviewing the careers of his five siblings, all of whom have been teachers at one time, Tibbetts said, "Our parents believed in education and worked hard. We had a great life growing up on the farm. We didn't have a lot of money. My mother especially was the backbone of our success as were the mothers of a lot of that generation in that town. They raised strong-willed people."

The eldest son, Danny, owns and operates a 100-head dairy farm next to Dwight and Marianne's house. "All of us went to college, got degrees and were good students." And there's another debt: former Whitefield selectman Alden Boynton, "who was almost like a parent to me," helped Dwight and his brothers and sisters by hiring them to work in the town's cemeteries.

"I don't think any of us would have gone to college if Alden hadn't made that possible. I have a lot of Whitefield in my heart," he said.

From his deck, which overlooks 130 acres of woods and fields and a far, hazy blue horizon pinned down by a panorama of nearly every mountain in western Maine, Tibbetts can say, "I have the best of both worlds." He can take pleasure in the sight of his brother's cows pasturing on some of his land, he can help bring in the hay, ride a tractor and enjoy (yes,

enjoy) the smell of manure, and at the same time do what he loves: play and arrange music.

Next fall he will take a break from teaching and pursue a master's degree in music education (band directing) from the University of Southern Oregon's American Band College.

He'll be learning more before then, however, as he plays with Downeast Brass this summer. The group includes some of the best brass players in Maine, he said. "I'm the lightweight and I couldn't be happier," he noted. "I will get better. You get better by playing with people who are better than you." Downeast Brass is scheduled to play at Olde Bristol Days the second weekend in August.

[<---CLICK HERE TO GO BACK](#)