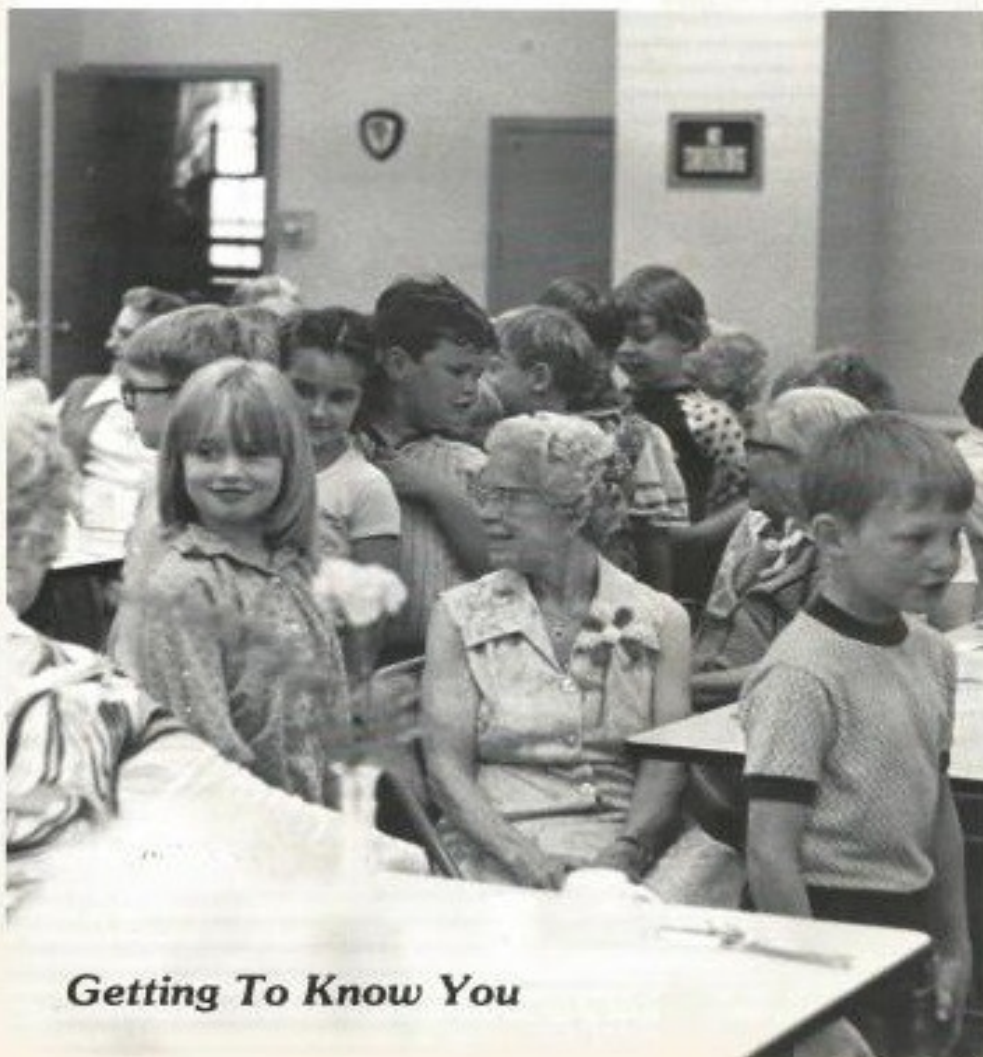


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Getting To Know You

Connett Keeps On Marching

... To Beat The Band

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Ray Connett is marching his way through life to beat the band.

The 90-year-old band leader and piano tuner from Piketon is very much his own man, but teases:

"My children look after me now just like I looked after them. One daughter checks up on me every night to see if I'm carrying on with anyone!"

Connett, founder of the Ohio University Band in 1923, has taught music and led bands much of his life, with piano tuning competing nose-for-nose for first-place attention from him.

Tall, slim and straight as a musical reed, with his blue eyes even more brilliant in color than the blue cap he sports, Connett has directed the Adelphi Men's Band for a dozen years, strutting around the state with the band at numerous festivals and fairs, with batons in hand.

He had decided not long ago to



Connett checks out an old player piano, he rebuilt with a vacuum cleaner motor to power its innards.



Standing at left with baton in hand, Ray Connett, at age 90, leads the Adelphi (Ohio) Band in a program on the U.S. Capitol Building grounds in June.

accept no more festival dates, but then reels off several he accepted, one of them at New Straitsville which, he laughed and said, "is the moonshine capital of the world."

He said he was in high school when he started taking dance bands there "and that moonshine was really great. Luckily, I had some restraining influence. I don't know what saved me. I never kept it up, but I did enjoy it for awhile."

He remembered: "It was really powerful. You just had to have a little bit and you'd go sky high!"

The Adelphi Men's Band, Connett said, is the oldest such unit in Ohio, dating back to the 1860's. Adelphi is northeast of Chillicothe in Ross County.

"There were sons and grandsons of the original members in the band at one time, but we've lost a lot of the young members and I don't know why," he said.

It was this Adelphi band that was led by Connett this summer on the lawn of the nation's Capitol, a "great experience" arranged by the office of Cong. Clarence E. Miller (R-10th District, Lancaster).

His prowess as a band leader is well established, and there just isn't any musical instrument unfamiliar to him, either, he says matter-of-factly. "I can play anything."

His big, yellow, ham-of-a-place on a Main Street corner in Piketon

is where he still spends a good share of his time tuning, refinishing and rebuilding pianos as a registered technician with the Piano Technicians Guild.

He has what he believes are proven theories on piano tuning, with 50 years of this work already behind him.

"A trained technician just can't tune a piano by ear alone, although many so-called piano tuners do it this way," Connett said. "A technician depends on sound — by the number of beats per interval." He uses a "C" tuning fork on one key, and from there establishes all the rest of the intervals by the number of beats, he explained.

The unlikely combination of a circus and a university got him started on his career in the world of music.

He recalled he was eight years old and living in his home on a corner of the Ohio University campus in Athens. Friendship with the university's librarian who lived next door, and the teacher of music led to piano and trumpet lessons.

"Then a circus musician, who was traveling with Ringling, came to his home in Athens to spend the winter. He organized a little band for boys — no girls. At that time, girls didn't play in the band. So from that I got a good start."

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He remembers it was about 1910 when he "followed the threshers around in the summer to earn money and I got acquainted with someone who raised horses. The man had just sold some horses to the Columbus Fire Department and asked me to take them there.

"So I rode one of them and took the other eight along — just herded them up Highway 23 which was just a common country road then. I didn't know any different!"

Connett said different jobs "just seemed to come along then, and I had been playing all that time. That band music was easy, just like falling off a log — that dance band music." It was after this period in his life he decided to return to study at Rochester Conservatory and then get his degree in music from Ohio University in 1931.

If band music was easy for him to play, so also was the music written by "March King" John Philip Sousa, Connett said. The "more difficult" marches he likes to play are those written by the circus musicians who have to play "a very stimulating march."

Connett said he played with Cole Brothers Circus when Clyde Beatty had his wild animal act, and "that act was real!" he emphasized. With the circus still in his blood, Connett

belongs to the Windjammers which is made up of musicians from all over who played in circus bands.

"All these things were an accident — getting acquainted with the Ringling Show Band in Athens as a boy, playing in a circus band," Connett believes.

He had taken his six children to the Cole Brothers Circus one afternoon so long ago the date has faded, and because of an accident involving the circus band director and a circus truck, he got to play with that band.

He was asked to fill in for the director because, "well, you know how boys are," he said of some of his music students roaming on the circus grounds. They had told the concerned circus staff Connett could pinch-hit for the director. "The boys told them I was 'the greatest'," Connett remembered, laughing.

He was teaching music students at high schools in the Athens area and at the university, he recalled, and had to turn down an invitation to join the circus band at that time.

"To be asked to go is really a compliment," he said, "because if you go into a circus band, you really have to know how to play. There isn't any doubt about it." He added: "At that time I didn't know it, but that was really my business —

music, and I didn't know I was in it!"

Commenting on today's music, Connett said he doesn't fight it "because I changed music in my day, too. I began 'filling in' a little bit when I played with the dance bands . . . adding harmony . . . filling in the long, sustained tones with my trumpet; knowing the melody I was playing from another song fit right in. Before long, other bands began doing what I had been doing, and it changed the picture altogether."

Connett believes the days of the bands he played in are gone. "You'll never hear the likes of them again. Now it's more of the savage beat to excite — just as the circus bands back then played the more exciting marches."

With his wife confined in a hospital for almost 40 years of their married life, until her death in 1977, Connett is no stranger also in the area of taking care of his home and raising his family.

He still maintains his own home and works in his piano shop just down the street. He no longer can roller skate, nor ice skate as much as he'd like any more, at the insistence of his family; and he decided to give up teaching music at age 80. He adds, however;

"But I still don't know that I've grown old."