

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH  
JUNE 27-JULY 3, 2002

Get

Out

It's

# Out & About

## COMPTON HEIGHTS CONCERT BAND

### This season's schedule

#### Saturday performances:

7 p.m. at Laumeier Sculpture Park, 13580 Rott Road, Sunset Hills

#### Sunday performances:

7:30 p.m. at Francis Park, Donovan Avenue and Eichelberger Street

#### Monday performances:

7:30 p.m. at Tower Grove Park, South Grand Boulevard and Magnolia Avenue

**How much:** Laumeier concerts \$5, children under 10 are free; Sunday and Monday concerts are free

**Info:** 314-776-2227

**More info:** Bingo is played Friday and Saturday nights at Bandwagon Hall, 6245 Lemay Ferry Road, to raise money for the band. 314-845-1877



# Compton Heights Concert Band

## took it one note at a time

### Guest performers

(in order of appearance)

**Robert Ellison**, baritone, who'll sing patriotic favorites

■ 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Francis Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. Monday, Tower Grove Park

### Those Darn

**Accordions**, a five-piece San Francisco group playing electric squeeze boxes

■ 7:30 p.m. July 7, Francis Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. July 8, Tower Grove Park

### St. Louis Blues!

Butch Wax & the Hollywoods, featuring Johnny Johnson plus free blue ice cream. A tribute to St. Louis blues (the music, not the hockey team)

■ 7:30 p.m. July 14;

■ 7:30 p.m. July 15

### Sax-o-Mania,

featuring the Nucleus Whales Saxophone Orchestra, a sextet playing jazz to classical and featuring the world's largest bass sax

■ 7 p.m. July 20, Laumeier Sculpture Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. July 21,

# took it one note at a time

By RICH KRECHEL  
Special to the Post-Dispatch

**T**wenty-five years ago, Harry Swanger learned the hard way to be careful about what he says because the words can backfire.

Swanger is executive director of the Compton Heights Concert Band. Here's how he got the job:

"I had just moved into Compton Heights in 1975 and for the first time in years they had an Easter parade," Swanger recalled. "Leading the parade was this gentleman carrying a tape recorder and playing marches on it.

"They had some kind of crude speakers set up, I believe on a pickup truck, and I made fun of this. I guffawed and said 'Where's the live music, where's the live music?' And the guy said, 'OK, wise guy, you're in charge of it next year.'"

What happened next has carried him through 25 years. Swanger called around the neighborhood and found seven or eight other people with some musical background. Most of them had not played in years.

"We got together in my living room and played notes, one note at a time," he said. "That's how simple and modest the beginning of the band was. I even had to borrow the instruments that most of them played.

"I'd go down to St. Mary's High

School on a Friday and pick up the instruments we needed. The band would play them on Sunday and then on Monday, first thing, I had to run them back."

The band's original conductor was Kaid Friedel. "He was a neighbor and a French horn player with the St. Louis Symphony," said Swanger. "I called Kaid to play in the band. It was still early on and people would say, 'You ought to call so-and-so.' So I called Kaid and asked him to play with us. He asked me if we had a conductor, and I said we didn't. He said, 'Well, I'm a professional conductor and would be glad to conduct your group.' So that's how that all started."

Swanger has always said that 1977 was the year his group became a real band.

"Tower Grove Park had started a music series for the first time in years," he said. "They didn't know about us, so they had already planned their series. When I looked at it I saw that during the last weekend they were the St. Louis Jazz Band and they were playing at 1 o'clock.

"We thought later in the afternoon would be a better time to play anyway, so we asked them, 'How about a double bill, with our new band at 3 p.m.?'"

The park said yes, and the rest is ongoing history.

"Most of our members are volunteers, or community musicians,

as I like to call them," Swanger continued. "They come from all walks of life. They can be teachers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, all kinds of professions."

As with any arts group, the Compton Heights Concert Band has had to struggle with budget problems. But Swanger, who long ago gave up practicing law, has always managed to keep the organization afloat.

The group's twice-weekly charity bingos have provided 40 to 50 percent of the income over the years, Swanger said.

The rest is through donations and ticket sales.

The band inadvertently has started to help fill a void in area entertainment left by the end of the St. Louis Symphony's Queeny Pops concert series.

About pops music, Swanger said, "That's our tradition, and we've built on that, and we've built quite a following."

For example, the Compton Heights band is one of the few sources of John Philip Sousa music outside of high school bands. Sousa's concerts were known "as the world's greatest pops concerts, and we kind of emulate that idea with our concerts," Swanger said. So Sousa's music is on the itinerary.

This week's schedule opens Sunday and Monday with "A July 4th Tribute," featuring the band, under principal conductor Edward



**The Nuclear Whales Saxophone Orchestra**



**Those Darn Accordions**

Dolbashian, with baritone Robert Ellison and the St. Louis Hills Chorus.

The tribute ends with Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" finale, replete with authentic Civil War cannons.

largest bass sax

■ 7 p.m. July 20,  
Laumeier Sculpture  
Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. July 21,  
Francis Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. July 22,  
Tower Grove Park

**Gez Whizney**, It's Disney, featuring James Christensen, music director for Walt Disney Productions, directing a concert of all-time Disney favorites

■ 7 p.m. July 27,  
Laumeier Sculpture  
Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. July 28,  
Francis Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. July 29,  
Tower Grove Park

**Hugh Smith**, the 4th Tenor, is the finale of the series and features the unsung, but electrifying voice of Smith, one of the world's great voices, joined by soprano Noree Boyd and the Windsor Theater Group singing opera classics

■ 7 p.m. Aug. 3,  
Laumeier Sculpture  
Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. Aug. 4,  
Francis Park;

■ 7:30 p.m. Aug. 5,  
Tower Grove Park