

MAY 2023 cityscene



City of Fairfax Band Director Takes His Final Bow

With an emphatic wave of his conductor's baton, Bob Pouliot will conclude his final concert as City of Fairfax Band director on May 13. Since his appointment in 1994, audiences have looked forward to seeing the accomplished conductor stride to his podium to lead the band, tuxedo coattails streaming behind him. People of all ages have been enraptured by his arrangements over the years, delighted by the skillfully played songs and the sense of community experienced at each concert.

As he steps away from the spotlight, Pouliot will conclude his final performance the same as always: with a deep bow toward the crowd, an acknowledging wave to the band members, and a smile that radiates the joy he feels every time his band delivers a memorable musical experience.

Pouliot said he hopes audiences will remember his time as music director fondly. "I hope that I've been able to give them something that they'll always remember," he said.

Fans of American composer John

Williams' movie scores were treated to an amazing performance at Fairfax High School on March 25. Every seat in the 1,146-seat auditorium was filled, and the audience was moved by familiar songs arranged in clever ways and awed by three exquisite soloists. The sold-out show was a testament to how much the band means to the community.

"Bob's leadership of the City of Fairfax Band has been extraordinary," said Jon Stehle, Fairfax City council member. "His focus on connecting with our entire community has been key in solidifying the important role the band plays in the unique character of our city. From annual holiday concerts to the children's concert in our Veterans Amphitheater to representing our city and nation at D-Day remembrances, the City of Fairfax Band has shown the entire world what makes the City of Fairfax so special."

Pouliot grew up in a very musical household. "I don't remember a time when I wasn't surrounded by music," he said. All of his older brothers and cousins played instruments, and his

BOB POULIOT'S ACCOLADES

- 2019 Outstanding Conductor Award from the Association of Concert Bands
- 2015 John Mason Arts Achievement Award from the City of Fairfax Commission on the Arts
- Meritorious Service Medal
- Air Force Commendation Medal

first music teachers were his aunt (piano) and his cousin (trumpet). His mother kept the TV tuned into the PBS station for the *Evening at Pops* and the Boston Symphony programs. At Christmas gatherings, family members created brass groups and played carols.

Pouliot received his bachelor's and master's degrees in music from *continued on page 6*

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Fairfax Band Director

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the University of Connecticut, where he worked as a church organist and choir director and took advantage of opportunities to conduct small groups and chamber orchestras. "There wasn't a time that I didn't picture myself standing on a podium," he said.

Recognizing that opportunities for professional conductors were few and far between, Pouliot saw the U.S. Air Force Band as a way to get hands-on experience working with professional musicians. He auditioned for — and was selected as — a band officer, and his first assignment was serving as the deputy commander and assistant conductor of the Military Airlift Command Band at Scott Air Force Base. Three years later, he earned his own command with the Air Force Band of the East at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey. A reduction in force led to the dissolution of his band squadron. He landed in D.C. as the executive director and associate conductor of the United States Air Force Band, spending six and a half years on community relations tours around the world. Pouliot was the conductor during ceremonies honoring former presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. "It was a great experience in my life," he said.

When Pouliot was released from the Air Force during another force reduction, he started his own recording and production business and found work as a church music director. After reading an ad in a conductor's guild journal, he accepted an opportunity to direct a community band in Bel Air, Md. It was his

first time working with volunteer musicians. "It was very rewarding," he recalled.

Six months later, an old friend from the Air Force alerted him that Dr. Tom Hill, the City of Fairfax Band conductor, was retiring, and the band was searching for a new leader. He was appointed music director in 1994, and the band has grown and prospered ever since. During his tenure, Main Street Community Band, Northern Virginia Youth Winds, and several small ensembles were created, and the annual Young Artist Competition was launched to encourage budding musicians. The band's website credits Pouliot's leadership for bringing the "association through its greatest period of artistic and organizational growth to date." Pouliot explained, "We've expanded to become more of an arts-presenting organization than merely a community band."

Don't miss *Finale!*, the Fairfax Band Association's final show of the season — and Bob Pouliot's final concert as conductor — at 7:30 May 13 at Katherine Johnson Middle School.

Pouliot has been on stage hundreds of times during his long career, but he said the band's Christmas concerts performed with the Fairfax Choral Society have been his favorite to arrange and conduct because there isn't a lot of music written for a band with a chorus. "The programs end up being very unique, and we look very entertaining," said Pouliot.

Pouliot is grateful for the moral and financial support from City Council over the years. "It's really helped the band not only survive but to thrive and to develop."

Pouliot said working with the musicians every week has been a very important part of his life, but after nearly 30 years, he thinks the band will benefit from new leadership. "They need to move on to some new ideas, a new person at the helm to take them to the next level," he said.

"It's been a great ride, a wonderful experience," said Pouliot of his years as band director.



LIVE LIFE IN THE ARTS

SPOTLIGHT EVENTS

Sweet Adelines – Vienna Falls Chorus

7:30 p.m. May 2
Sherwood Center. Free.



Fairfax Sax Quartet – "Almost Latin"

7:30 p.m. May 4
Sherwood Center. Free.



Music to Free – "Hope and Remembrance," A Concert for those affected by Cancer

8 p.m. May 5
Sherwood Center. \$15.

City of Fairfax Theatre Company "Clybourne Park"

April 28 – May 7
Old Town Hall
\$25/adult, \$20/student

OTHER EVENTS



Next Reflex "Flight"

5 p.m. May 13
Providence Park. Free.

City of Fairfax Band Association "Finale"

7:30 p.m. May 13
Katherine Johnson Middle School
\$15/adult, \$10/senior, students free