

# **A Chat with the New MHS Band Director**

- Alex Kerai

The Marblehead High School football season has begun, and with that comes the annual commencement of the high school Marching Band program. Although marching band may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of the football season, it is an integral part of the Friday night home games. The band is always there, for every game, rain or shine, sitting in the right side of the stands playing pep tunes for all four quarters. This group also starts off each home game by playing the Star-Spangled Banner and providing half-time entertainment with a musical show. But after twenty-seven years under the leadership of Mr. Ken Warren, the band is going through some changes. After announcing his retirement last year, band members were unsure of what would happen to the program, but it is continuing now under the direction of Mr. Scott Winship, who was previously the band director for Swampscott High School. He came over to Marblehead this year with Mr. Layne Millington (our new high school principal). After last Friday's game against Gloucester (and the debut of the first song in the band's halftime show), I interviewed Mr. Winship and asked what he thought of the band and what his plans are for the coming future.

**Q: What is your background in music and music education?**

A: "I have my Bachelor's in Science in music education from Rhode Island College. My Master's is in music, with a concentration in wind band conducting, from the University of Nebraska. I played the soprano bugle in the Boston Crusaders Drum and Bugle Corps; before that I was in the Marine Drum and Bugle Corps."

**Q: How did you hear about the position in Marblehead?**

A: "Basically what happened was last Thanksgiving, when we were practicing the Star-Spangled Banner before the game, Mr. Warren came up to me and said, "By the way, at the end of this year I'm retiring and you should apply for my job." And so I was like, "Okay, I will." Ironically, the principal that hired me in Swampscott was hired in Marblehead. It was like the stars aligned: the principal who hired me and the old band director said I should apply, it was like kismet."

**Q: What do you think of Marblehead (the town)?**

A: "I love it! It's like a Norman Rockwell painting! It's what you think of when you think of small town America: beautiful houses, picket fences, out by the ocean. There are some mansions, but there is just normal American life. It's a beautiful town, I don't know how else to put it. I drive home and I'm like, "I'm so happy to work here.""

**Q: What do you think of the Marblehead High School band so far?**

A: "I tell you guys [the band] this all the time, I'm very impressed. You're good musicians, but you can be better. And that's what I like, because I can make you better."

I love marching band – I’ve done drum corps and all that and I love it – but my real passion is concert band. That’s what my Master’s is in. We’re still a month’s away from doing it, but I’m already picking music and you guys are going to love it. You guys already have this great ability...I would say right now you guys are slightly above average in music level, according to a national or a state level. But I want to bring you guys up. You have average, excellent and superior levels, and I want to bring you up to superior. It won’t happen this year, but we’ll get there. We’re going to get up to excellent this year; that’s my goal.”

**Q: What do you plan to add/bring to the band program?**

A: The biggest thing is I want to expose you guys to all these competitions out there. UMass Band Day, on October 12, where you guys can go and play with the UMass Band (and around fifty other high schools) during halftime, and then watch them play their halftime show, is a great experience. I’ve done it in the past and everyone’s loved it. There’s the New England Scholastic Band Association (NESBA) Championships in Lawrence, where we’re going to go and just watch and see what the bands that are there are doing so you guys know what’s out there. I want to expose every ensemble to at least two, if not three or four, experiences or competitions. Even if you guys don’t compete, at least you’re going to see what’s out there and what you guys can do.

Mr. Warren didn’t take you guys anywhere, which was cool. I respect what he did with you guys, but there’s a whole world out there. The things we’re doing are already out there – there are hundreds of schools, we won’t be alone. So we’re going to do a lot more competitions, some just for viewing and some for competing, but I’m definitely going to get you guys out there. We’re still going to do the same things that you guys have done every year that Mr. Warren left for me, but I’m going to get you guys out there and create more memories from band, too.

In short, I want to expose you guys to as many performance opportunities as possible. I don’t care about trophies or winning awards; this is so you guys can build experiences. That’s what I did in high school. My band wasn’t great. We didn’t win many awards, but it is those memories that I still have. The memories are the important thing, the music and having fun are the most important parts.”

*Alex plays in the drumline for the MHS marching band and guitar in the Jazz Band.*