

High school band members join together for virtual performance

KEN GRABOWSKI, Associate Editor 5:54 pm EDT, Wednesday, April 15, 2020



Manistee High School senior Ryan Biller works on creating a virtual band performance of John Phillip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever." Biller sent out a Facebook request for other students to send him videos of them performing the classic song and then molded them all into a performance he placed online.(Courtesy photo)

MANISTEE — Every negative situation that occurs in the world usually produces an equally positive one as a result.

When Manistee High School student Ryan Biller found out the final few months of his senior year was being canceled due to the COVID-19

pandemic, he was naturally disappointed. Most students in their senior year are creating their final memories of their school years with special events like proms, band concerts and graduations, but that isn't going to happen this year.

Biller plans to head off to Central Michigan University in the fall if the COVID-19 pandemic permits, where he hopes to study music. However, he isn't letting the final weeks of his senior year go by without creating a few special memories from senior year, thanks to the assistance of technology.

He created a virtual band with students performing the same musical piece at various locations which he edited together into a group performance. They group performed John Phillip Sousa's classic "Stars and Stripes Forever." The finished product can be found on YouTube at youtube.com/watch?v=vl-DsRFJ4o8&t=44s .

"I wanted to do the virtual aspect for quite a while and with the quarantine and what is going on, it made the perfect opportunity for it," said Biller. "So I made a Facebook post saying I needed videos of students playing 'Stars and Stripes Forever,' and how to do it with music attached that they could email to me. Sousa's music is actually a national march, and I figured what better number to perform."

Videos started coming in from various locations around the state, and Biller went to work using technology to take individual performances that he then worked into a group performance.

"It worked out pretty well as 15 students participated, and we had pretty much all of the band parts," said Biller. "Some performed with more than one instrument as there was piccolo, saxophone, clarinet, French horn, trombones and percussion to name a few. There were more students from our school who wanted to participate, but some of them had their instruments at school and couldn't get at them."

Biller said the technology then brought it all together in what sounds like an actual band performing in concert.

"I used something called iMovie on my laptop and it took a long time to edit all the audio because everyone used a metronome, which with headphones, told them how fast to perform the song," he said. "Even with a metronome, people get a little ahead or back, as playing it alone it is a totally different feel than playing it in a group with 60 other people."

That meant it took Biller some time to edit it all together, but it was strictly a labor of love for him. He had 20 videos from the 15 people who participated; some sent video of themselves playing more than one instrument. A week later he came up with the finished product that he posted on YouTube for people to enjoy.

"It was interesting in starting with the first one and then moving along, as I got to about the 10th video all the harmonies started coming together and it started sounding more like the original product (when performed by a band) like you are hearing it in a concert," said Biller.

Biller said he included on his Facebook post his reasons behind creating this virtual band. He put to words what so many high school seniors across America are feeling at this time.

"The 'Stars and Strips', besides being our national march, is also a tradition at a lot of high schools including our own here at Manistee High School," said Biller. "Every spring concert we play it in some form, whether it is our big finale or the high school band plays it by ourselves. I have done that for the past four years since middle school and with being a senior we are not going to have a band concert with schools being closed this year. So this was kind of the seniors' last chance to play this song and in a high school group."

He said band is like any group of students in that they form a bond, and

although he is going on to study it in college, many of his fellow seniors will never get that opportunity to perform again in their high school band.

"I will never get to do that again with our high school band and this was a cool opportunity to do something like a, end of my high school band years opportunity," said Biller. "It has really taken off, and people seem to be receiving it well. (It) was more of a sentimental thing for me. We had our senior selections for graduation picked out, but we will never get to do that, so this helps."

Members of the band included Biller (saxophone, Manistee High School), Selena Capman (Piccolo, Fennville High School), Rayna Nenis (piccolo, Muskegon Reeths-Puffer High School), Jonathan Krause (oboe, Muskegon Reeths Puffer High School), Maya Shih (clarinet, Rochester High School), Emily Sullivan (clarinet, Manistee High School), Seth Thompson (clarinet, Manistee High School), Jack Letica (alto saxophone, Avondale High School), Karri Grillo (tenor saxophone, Ludington High School), Bridget Bruse (tenor saxophone, Airport High School), Madeline Frey (French horn, Petoskey High School), Liam Quinn (French horn, Manistee High School), Ben Sullivan (trombone, Manistee High School) and Jack O'Donnell (snare drum/marimba, Manistee High School).

SEE ALSO:

[Spreading hope with lights](#)

[MAPS acknowledges the sacrifice of the Class of 2020](#)