

The Seuffert Band Is in Its 16th Year of Serenading in Queens

By JOHN S. WILSON

With a fanfare of "East Side, West Side," the Music Grove of Forest Park, in Glendale, Queens, last Sunday began its 16th consecutive summer of living up to its name. The fanfare inaugurated a series of programs by the Seuffert Band that will be held every Sunday afternoon at 3 P.M. through the Labor Day weekend.

The 40 musicians in the band—the 37 men wearing white, open-collared shirts and dark trousers, the three women in dresses—sat in the bandshell facing an audience of rambunctious children, family groups and elderly people who sat on wooden benches shaded by oak trees or relaxed in folding chairs set up on the edges of the 7,500-seat grove.

The band's program ranged from the traditional band-in-the-park march—in this case, Robert Russell Bennett's "S.S. Eagle," with Mr. Bennett on hand to take a bow—to a Dixieland combo version of "Sentimental Journey."

En route, the band played Brahms and Tchaikowsky, excerpts from a movie score ("Dr. Zhivago") and from a Broadway musical ("Man of La Mancha"), introduced a young soprano, Sharon Pellisier, offered a trumpet solo specialty by Leona May Smith on "The Toy Trumpet," played a beguine, a bossa nova and a hymn, and ended up, as the Seuffert Band always ends up, with John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever."

It was representative of the programs that the Seuffert Band will offer every Sunday throughout the summer.

"We try to have at least one selection that will appeal

to every listener," said George F. Seuffert, who conducts the band. "We don't underestimate the musical intelligence of the audience, but we try to have as much variety as possible."

Mr. Seuffert, (pronounced Soy-fert), a handsome, vigorous, 59-year-old former marine, inherited the Seuffert Band from his father, whose name was also George Seuffert, and who started the band in 1901 as an offshoot of the Concordia Military Band, formed in 1894. The younger Mr. Seuffert began conducting it in 1928, when he was 16 years old.

A year later, Mr. Seuffert tried to organize some concerts in the parks under commercial sponsorship. But Robert Moses, then the Commissioner of Parks, was opposed to commercialism in the parks, so Mr. Seuffert took his band instead into high school auditoriums. But after a six-year campaign, he says, "I convinced Moses that companies are just as eager to have a good public image as the Guggenheims."

Interrupted by War

So the band began a parks program that was interrupted by World War II when Mr. Seuffert served in the Marine Corps. He did not return to the parks until the mid-fifties when Local 802 of the Musicians Union appealed to him to do something to save the Music Grove in Forest Park from a scheduled demolition.

With the cooperation of Local 802 and the Music Performance Trust Funds of the Recording Industries, Mr. Seuffert got four Queens savings banks to sponsor a program of four Sunday concerts in the Music Grove in the summer of 1956.

Those banks—the Richmond

Hill, Jamaica, Hamburg and Ridgewood Savings Banks—have remained the core of the band's sponsors since then as the concert series has been expanded from four concerts a summer to 12 to 14 concerts.

The expansion has been made possible by the addition of other sponsors. Last Sunday's concert was sponsored by the Workmen's Benefit Fund, an insurance organization. Today's is sponsored by the Karl Ehmer Pork Stores. July is "Savings Bank Month." The August concerts are sponsored by Rheingold Beer and the final concert, Labor Day weekend, is sponsored by the Weis Volkswagen Corporation.

Mr. Seuffert has been closely involved with New York music since he first raised a baton in front of the Seuffert Band. He taught music in the New York City school system from 1931 to 1967. He is now music director of the Fordham University Band and the New York University Band. As music consultant to Mayor Lindsay, he provides music for official affairs of the city. And the Seuffert Band plays at both Belmont and Aqueduct Race Tracks on holidays, stakes days and whenever a band is required.

The Seuffert Band boasts one of the few woman trumpet soloists in the world, Leona May Smith. Miss Smith is also Mrs. Seuffert. They

met when she was a soloist with the Edwin Franko Goldman Band and he was an occasional guest conductor.

Since then she has been featured with Fred Waring, has been the solo trumpet in the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra and is now the solo trumpet in the Metropolitan Opera Stage Band. The Seufferts have four sons, one of whom, Eddie, 21, is a percussionist in his father's band.

As for ending every program with "Stars and Stripes Forever," Mr. Seuffert says: "I think it's the greatest march ever written. My father and I had great affection for Sousa, whom we both knew very well."