

MARYLAND

MUSICIANS REACH OUT FOR FREE: The Baltimore Philharmonia Orchestra, led by former BSO violinist Raffaele Faraco (below), is a nonprofit, mostly volunteer community orchestra that offers free concerts to those who otherwise might not be able to hear the kind of music they play. **PG 3**



NO QUESTION
Peter Schmuck sees no drama in Sportsman of the Year selection



RUN AWAY
Wilde Lake and Jerrel Epps gallop past Hereford, 42-16, in Class 3A semifinal

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An old pro pushes, prods

Former BSO violinist, 87, cajoles his eclectic charges to 'play music'

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Leaning against a stool with his conductor's baton at the ready, Raffaele Faraco is leading his musicians through their first reading of a complicated Beethoven symphony.

The 87-year-old former violinist with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra interrupts the group repeatedly to offer suggestions. He jokes about his creaky bones and encourages them to "play music, not just the notes." And he pushes and prods his orchestra members — computer programmers, office secretaries, dietitians, court reporters and police dispatchers — to do better. And to try it again.

"It sounds like it has boots on. And there's no water and there's no mud out," Faraco said of a section of music that was supposed to be crisp and lively. "The lighter the better. And once in a while, a fortissimo!"

The Baltimore Philharmonia Orchestra is an unusual collection of musicians. An offshoot of the Gettysburg Symphony, the nonprofit community orchestra was founded 11 years ago to bring together musicians from diverse backgrounds and perform free concerts for audiences that might not otherwise be able to afford tickets to a classical show. Most of the musicians — save for the few professionals from the BSO brought in to fill out the orchestra's ranks for concerts — are not paid.

"I find it inspiring that everyone in the group loves music," said Merrell Weiss, a 53-year-old flute and piccolo player and a retired computer systems analyst for the federal government. "No matter what they do to earn their keep, they still want to play music."

The orchestra's next performance will be tomorrow afternoon at Loch Raven High School in Baltimore County.

When it started, the Baltimore Philharmonia could not afford sheet music. The musicians borrowed some from the Long Island high school that Weiss attended as a girl and where several of her friends now teach music. Because the orchestra isn't anyone's full-time job, rehearsals are sometimes hampered by the players' hectic schedules. (The group skipped a percussion section of one piece of music at a recent rehearsal because the percussion section — all two of them — had not arrived.) And as gas prices soared this year, they lost a cellist who found the drive to rehearsals at Loch Raven High too expensive.

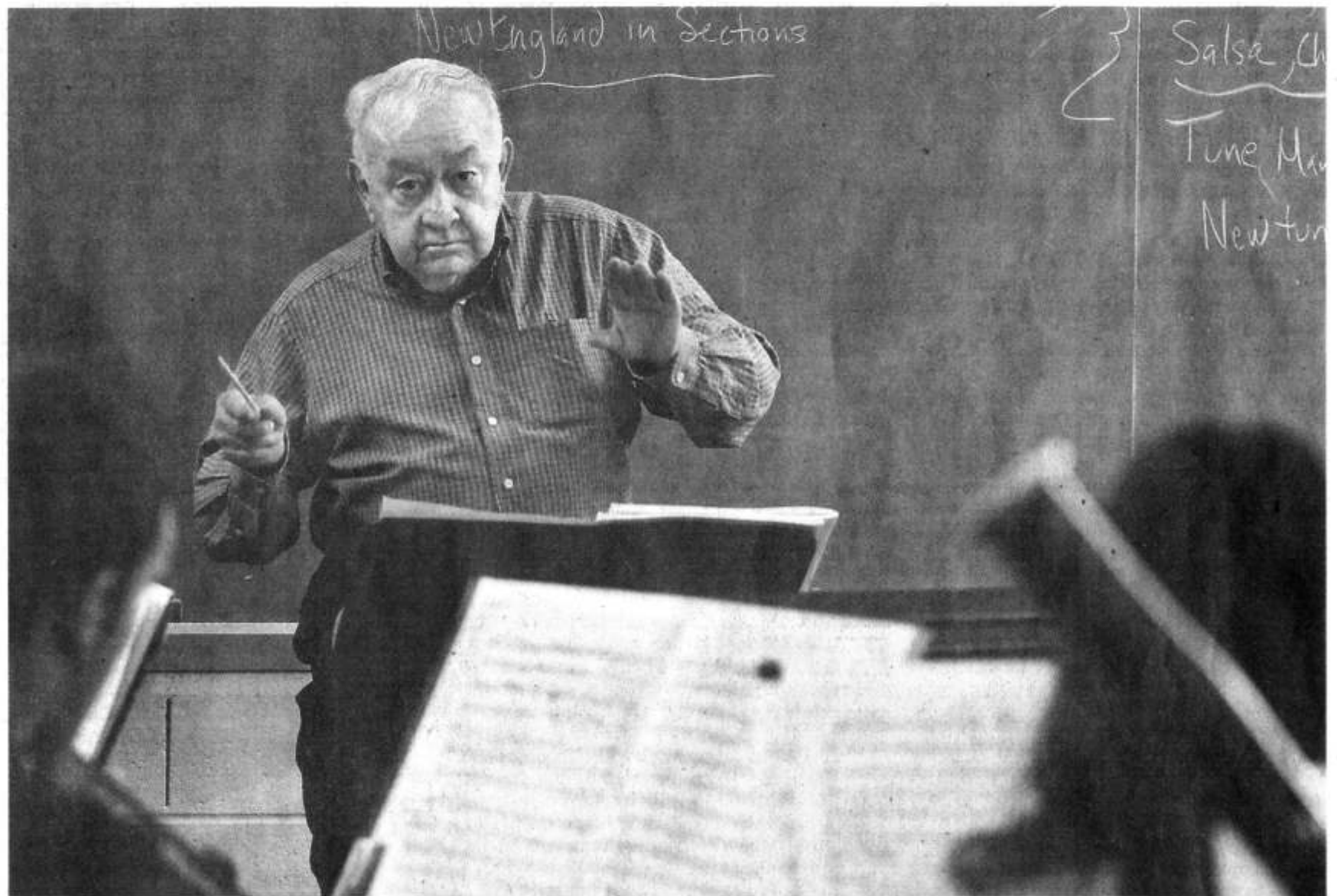
"It's a different ballgame," said Faraco, a graduate of the Juilliard School of Music who played violin with the BSO for 37 years. "You still have an orchestra. But in a regular, professional symphony orchestra, the conductor comes in and everyone knows the piece already. Sometimes, with these pieces that we play, the members don't know the work, and they've never heard it. They're doing different jobs all over the city — doctors' offices, at Social Security, banks, all kinds of jobs. They come to the orchestra to get more joy out of listening to this music."

Boris Kim, 69, of Pasadena played the violin as a teenager. But after a few years, he pretty much set aside the instrument until he retired in 2000 after a long career as a researcher at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. He heard about the Baltimore Philharmonia in 2001 while taking music lessons and has played with the group ever since.

"They play very advanced music — it's just like a professional orchestra and one of the few places where an amateur can get to play that," he said. "It's one of the highest things you can aspire to learn. To become a good physicist, you have to spend a few years — not too many years — of study. To become a good violinist takes many years of study and practice."

His wife, Margaret, tries not to miss any of the group's concerts.

"They're wonderful," the 67-year-old said. "The



Conductor Raffaele Faraco, 87, leads a rehearsal of the Baltimore Philharmonia Orchestra. BALTIMORE SUN PHOTOS: KENNETH K. LAM

if you go:

The Baltimore Philharmonia Orchestra performs its last concerts of the year at 3 p.m. tomorrow at Loch Raven High School, 1212 Cowpens Ave., and at 3 p.m. Dec. 7 at St. Anthony of Padua Roman Catholic Church, 4414 Frankford Ave. All concerts are free. The symphony resumes its concert schedule in March and April with a spring series. Information: www.bpoinfo.net.

music is as good, I would think, as the BSO. It just doesn't have the acoustics. They're playing in a high school or a church."

Pat Dick, 54, a court reporter in Jarrettsville who works primarily on lawsuit depositions, has played the violin since a nun at Catholic High School handed her the instrument four decades ago. Faraco, who conducted the school's orchestra at the time, was her first violin teacher, and she has been playing in community orchestras since the 1970s.

"It gets you away from your daily life," she said. "It's a relaxing change of pace. ... If you're playing on your own at home, it's just you. It's a little more challenging if you're playing in an orchestra. It's how it all comes together — and it sounds pretty nice."

To Weiss, the flute and piccolo player who lives in Owings Mills, performing with an orchestra or a concert band is nothing short of a natural high and a kind of out-of-body experience.

"There's a part of our brains that just needs that stimulation. That's how we'll be happy," said Weiss, who helped start the orchestra. "There are certain passages when I'm sitting there playing them, I'm like, 'Oh, yes.' It's almost like that movie, *When Harry Met Sally*. Music means a lot to me."

Although some of the musicians have little orchestral experience, their conductor said he treats them no differently from those who have been playing for years and know much of the repertoire that the Baltimore Philharmonia tackles.

"I just ask them to sit down and play in the orchestra," Faraco said. "I don't make them nervous. Because when a conductor stares at you, it gets everything too excited and too nervous, and lots of mistakes happen that way. You just fluster them up — it's no use. I just ignore them and let them sink or swim by themselves."

"Once in a while, you glance at them and you can see pretty much what they can do. Then, I urge them to do a little bit better and give suggestions, especially with the string players."

"I do know," he added, "a little bit about violin playing."

That is a rather humble understatement. Faraco, whose parents moved to New York from Italy in 1920, the year before he was born, began playing the violin before his eighth birthday.

"My mother was leaning toward the cello for me. But then she decided, 'No, he's so small, he'd have a hard time carrying it around,'" Faraco recalled. An instructor came to the apartment where his family lived, and an uncle who played the mandolin supervised his practice sessions.



Monica Christopher of Cockeysville, a 911 police dispatcher, practices the viola with the Baltimore Philharmonia Orchestra. It was founded 11 years ago to bring together musicians from diverse backgrounds and perform free concerts.