

During Basic Training, Composer Was A 'Brat'

By DARLA LOOSE
Tribune Staff Writer

LAKELAND — Back when the Tijuana Brats were having fun with their music in the late '60s Howard Buss was cutting classes at West Chester State College in Pennsylvania to play with them.

The Brats modeled their name after a more famous group of brass musicians organized by Herb Alpert, and their name spoofs didn't end there. One of their hits was "Yakety Brats," a takeoff on "Yakety Brass" by saxophonist Boots Randolph.

Best known in the Midwest, the Brats hit the Top 40 in popular music with some of their recordings, did a lot of traveling and got some national television exposure.

The Brats had a deal with Mike Douglas, Buss said, to perform on his show whenever an act canceled at the last minute, which they did about seven or eight times including an appearance with Douglas at Cypress Gardens.

Buss, then a young college student, played trumpet and trombone and did a little arranging with the Brats. He calls those days his "basic training" in the world of music outside the campus doors of his composition classes.

"I've never lost my spirit for

bands," said the 30-year-old Buss, now a composer of more serious music who teaches music appreciation and composition at Florida Southern College.

So far Buss has published about 20 compositions with music companies in New York City and Baltimore and is beginning to see his work performed locally.

"Camel Music" may be his most successful work. It is currently being broadcast in North America as part of a National Public Radio series and has been played in a number of contemporary music festivals.

"Camel Music" is technically quite progressive, Buss said. It features a solo trombonist who also sings a text based on an Aesop fable.

In November Buss and his wife, Judy, performed his work "Capriccio" in Tampa at the University of South Florida. They played trombone and clarinet with USF music professor Bob McCormick, also a member of the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra, playing a variety of percussion instruments.

"Dialogue," a sonata for clarinet and piano, will premier in Lake Wales late in January. And the Lakeland Senior High School Wind Ensemble will perform "Fanfare" during a Dec. 15 concert at 7:30 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church on

Lake Hollingsworth.

The Wind Ensemble is brand new, too, and the concert, which is free to the public, will be their first performance.

The spirit of "Fanfare" is "relevant to this time of year" although it is not a Christmas piece per se, Buss said. The music was inspired by the dramatic release of the American hostages from Iran last January.

"The timing of the event with the change of power between the two presidents made it a very powerful day," he said. "I just felt very inspired. My patriotism was rekindled."

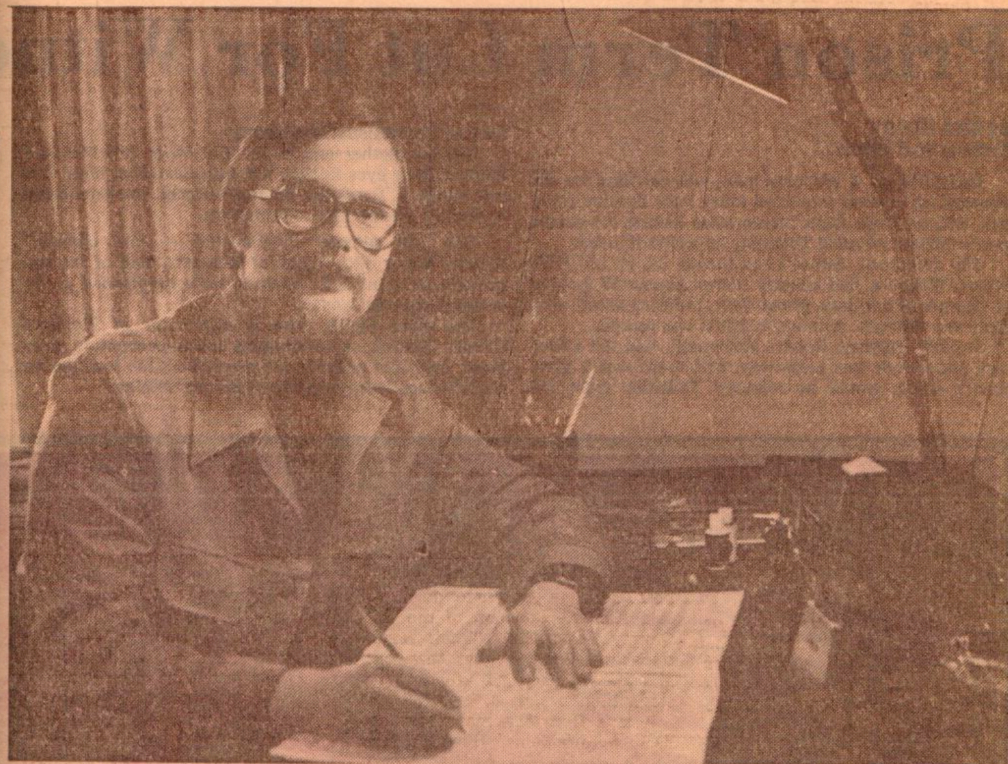
Buss said the music that came to him was spontaneous and had "a lot of fanfare and sparkle to it."

He may eventually send the music to the White House or a military band in Washington, but it will be a while before "Fanfare" is in a finished state.

Composing is a lengthy, intensely laborious process, Buss said. Creating the music is just the beginning.

"Some use the piano and some just use their head. That's what I did in this particular piece. You have a good idea what it's going to sound like but you never know until you get with the group and start rehearsing."

Diversions



Howard Buss, a composer and teacher at Florida Southern College, played with a group called The Brats during his college days. — Tribune Photo by Larry Alspaugh

The composer makes sure all the notes sound the way he wanted them to, then the players have to learn their parts and put some polish on the piece. After a lot of refinement, it is finished.

But it "doesn't happen that fast,"

Buss said, "Some composers really crank it out fast. I like to let it ferment." And he estimates that for every minute of finished music he has worked perhaps 20 hours "getting it down on paper."

Then scoring the parts for each

instrument may take another 10 hours per minute of music.

As part of the publication process, Buss said next Tuesday night's performance of "Fanfare" will be professionally recorded.