

Brass band championship to have international tone

By Eileen Daday | Daily Herald Columnist

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John Meling of Arlington Heights has gone toe-to-toe with students for 33 years in his role as a science teacher and administrator at Prospect, Wheeling, Rolling Meadows and Elk Grove high schools, and this semester as an adjunct professor at Harper College.

But soon, he will find himself up against an 11-year-old, and a prodigy, at that.

Meling is one of the featured soloists with the Prairie Brass Band competing in next week's U. S. Open Brass Championships, taking place on Nov. 10 at St. Viator High School in Arlington Heights.

The fifth annual contest begins at 9:30 a.m. and runs through 4:30 p.m., with 25-minute performances by some of the best brass bands in the field. In fact, of the eight bands entered, three are rated among the top 50 bands in the world.

While each band will be competing for the \$1,000 prize and championship trophy, they also will be vying for some of the special awards, including best soloist.

One of the favorites is 11-year-old soloist Peter Moore, who plays trombone with the band, Wingates, coming from Bolton, England. He will be playing an emotional rendition of the gospel hymn, "Blessed Assurance," that has drawn rave reviews at different European venues.

When he's not performing with Wingates, or going to school, Moore plays solo trombone with the National Children's Orchestra in England.

Meantime, Meling, plays euphonium, which looks like a small tuba but plays in the range of a trombone. He will perform the upbeat and showy number, "Bravura," which challenges him to play everything from rapid-fire, fast paced sections with lots of notes, to extreme range changes on his horn.

His solo comes amid the band's set that also includes a British march, a piece composed by trumpeter Chuck Mangione, as well as the movie score from the original, "Robin Hood," starring actor Errol Flynn.

"There's nothing like playing for a competition," Meling says. "It really raises the level of the entire band."

During the day, fans will be able to see brass bands from Eastern Iowa, the Motor City, and Milwaukee, as well as the Illinois Brass Band based in Lincolnshire, which took third at the North American Brass Band championships last spring.

Last year's "most entertaining band," at the U.S. Open, the Fountain City Brass Band, from Kansas City, returns as well as the defending champion, the Brass Band of Central Florida.

Yet through it all, the competition will have a British feel, with BBC announcer Frank Renton returning to serve as emcee.

Dallas Niermeyer, the former band director at Hersey High School in Arlington Heights and Prairie Brass Band director, says his band mounts the competition to broaden the brass band fan base.

"This is the only entertainment contest of this type anywhere in North America," Niermeyer says. "And this is the fourth year we've drawn a band from England, so we must be doing something right to draw some of the top bands in the world."

Tickets to the competition are \$20, and may be obtained by calling (847) 398-1732, or visiting www.usopenbrass.org. Limited tickets will be available at the door. St. Viator High School is located at 1213 E. Oakton Ave. in Arlington Heights.