

Right: Bob Lee in a performance of "Annie"

Below: Lee with members of the church choir

Below right: Lee in costume



The show must go on

By day, Bob Lee delivers his route as a letter carrier, but by night, you can find him belting out a song.

The Boston Branch 34 member, who began his postal career in 1986 and whose longtime route includes the Massachusetts State House, caught the performing bug early. Lee was a member of a marching bugle corps called the Boston Crusaders during high school, and shortly before joining the Postal Service, he briefly instructed high school bands.

More than 30 years ago, the new carrier was recruited to sing in a church choir, and soon a local musical director for community theater pursued him.



"It's a logical thing to go from drum corps to being in front of a crowd," he said. "I started on a few auditions. I got a role and it continued on from there."

Lee then was approached 28 years ago to join a semi-professional dinner theater troupe, Hot Spot Cabaret.

"I was encouraged all along the way by musical directors," he said. "I was very lucky."

The carrier's involvement with his three groups spans the year. His community theater schedule depends on what shows are going on, and he has even directed a few in the past, including "42nd Street" and "Annie." The church choir runs from fall to June, with quiet summers, and the cabaret group is May through December.

With his cabaret club, he performs as part of a musical revue at various venues such as Elks clubs and church groups in Massachusetts—in downtown Boston, in Worcester and on Cape Cod, among other places. "We usually perform, I'd

say, eight to 12 shows a year," he said. These include a big summer show in July and a holiday show in December.

Lee and his fellow entertainers sing, dance and tell jokes in a variety show in the same vein as "The Carol Burnett Show." "We're a throwback to that type of era," he says.

The carrier has no problem getting into character. He has dressed as everything from a member of the Supremes to a circus clown and loves to make people laugh. "We try not to take ourselves too seriously," he says. "We do it for the entertainment of the audience."

A lot of time is dedicated to rehearsing for the performances. "Usually around Columbus Day we gear up for the Christmas shows," Lee says. "It gets more intense as the show approaches."

They have a rotation of musical numbers they know well and plug them in to make up a show. They rotate about 12 to 15 numbers as a big opening act, including medleys from shows such as "Les Misérables" and "Miss Saigon." Lee said he and his fellow performers all own tuxedos and formal wear for finales.

His favorite performers are Danny Kaye and Hugh Jackman, whom he called "well rounded." His favorite role, of those he's played, is Alfie Doolittle in "My Fair Lady," and he would like to play him again. "I'd do that again in a heartbeat," he said.

Though the carrier loves being on stage, he says that stage fright still hits every once in a while. "I'm not a kid anymore, so I have to concentrate on my lines," he said.

With his community theater group, he also helps put together non-profit projects, like shows at about half a dozen local senior developments and at charity benefits. For those, they perform what Lee calls a "road show,"

a 45-minute cabaret-style performance.

Balancing his postal career and performing career can be challenging at times, but it's worth it, he says. "I love being a letter carrier...but doing both can be difficult," Lee said. Sometimes he'll go straight from work to a choir practice to another rehearsal, and some weeks he'll have multiple performances night after night to make it easier for members to block out their calendars.

Lee, who spent six years as a shop steward, says that his co-workers have been supportive of his musical pastime, with up to a dozen attending shows. And on occasion, his colleagues get to hear his talent in the post office. "I do break out [in song] on the workroom floor from time to time," he says.

After cabaret shows, Lee enjoys speaking with audience members, who he says are usually surprised that he's a mailman. More often than not, he'll discover six degrees of separation from the person because of his job.

The coronavirus pandemic has thrown a monkey wrench into his plans, with shows being canceled. "Things have been shut down and it's frustrating," he said.

"We're usually right [now] in the throes of rehearsing for a summer show."

Lee still connects with his fellow entertainers via Zoom every week. "It's good to sit down and trade stories," he said, adding that they can't wait until they're "getting back to what we love to do."

Overall, the carrier is pleased at how his musical career has turned out. "I don't see myself going on Broadway, but you never know," he said. "It gives me great joy and I've made wonderful friends.

"I'm not Pavarotti," Lee added, but "I think I've made a lot of people happy." **PR**

