

New Brightonite to perform at Special Olympics

Ex-Willowbrook resident, a musical whiz, to be in spotlight

It seemed like a herculean feat, so when Burton Petrone mastered nine musical instruments, officials at the Willowbrook Developmental Center felt the 54-year-old former resident should perform at the 1975 Special Olympics.

Tomorrow he will get his chance, having been chosen by the talent committee of the olympics to perform before more than 3,000 persons when the games get under way.

The olympics began today in Mt. Pleasant, Mich., and will last through the weekend. But for Petrone, now living at 203 Beechwood Ave., New Brighton, the highlight will be tomorrow when he gets the chance to play many of his instruments.

With a handicap of borderline retardation, Petrone became an accomplished musician on the drums, organ, glockenspiel, guitar, fife, harmonica, piano, ukulele and the vibraphone.

Competing against seven other musicians, Petrone was subsequently invited to perform at the games, which are designed in the fashion of the Olympics, showcasing the athletic achievements of the handicapped.

Petrone, who plays music by ear and does not distinguish musical keys, has a repertoire that includes old-time favorites, marches, country-western music, and popular music, including many of the theme songs from television and movies.

Petrone, as part of his wide variety of activities on Staten Island, plays in a folk-rock

mass in St. Peter's R.C. Church, New Brighton.

And as a former member of the Willowbrook band, Petrone has performed in many parades commemorating special holidays throughout the city.

But perhaps the highlight of his musical career came when Petrone appeared as a guest musician on one of the first telethons for mental retardation hosted by entertainer Martha

Raye. In addition, Petrone has given performances in the Astor Hotel, the Waldorf-Astoria, the Hilton and the Americana, as well as in Madison Square Garden.

Under the guidance of Joseph Lombardi, Petrone's talents expanded until this year when a tape of Petrone's multi-musical talents was submitted to the talent committee of the games. The committee chose him to perform

before more than 3,000 Special Olympic athletes, their coaches and spectators.

Expenses for Petrone's chaperone were provided by members of the New York Stock Exchange, who formed in a softball league and donated proceeds from the games to a fund to benefit Willowbrook residents.

Petrone has lived with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bethel at the Beechwood Ave. address since 1972. He is employed at the United Cerebral Palsy workshop in Port Richmond.



Burton Petrone taps away at the vibraphone, an instrument which he will use to entertain tomorrow at the 1975 Special Olympics in Michigan.

S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns