John Dunphy started his musical education on piano before picking up trombone at La Salle College High School. Later, he pursued Music Education at West Chester University, studying vocal music, brass, percussion, composition, and more. He has taught music at every level from elementary school to college and has a long résumé as a liturgical musician.

At a youthful 81 years old, Dunphy still plays tuba every Sunday with a neighborhood quintet, the Wyncote Brass. He believes that music education is about more than just notes. It’s about learning with a sense of community among students. He says, “We speak about it a lot, but John makes it happen. He works at it in a way that seems effortless. Over the years, the kids have known that he cares about them. They really look up to him.”

Dunphy developed a bottom-up philosophy for Music Activities, stressing student ownership of their organizations. The staff of the office still empower students to make decisions about scheduling, travel, budget and repertoire. In making art together, the students learn to collaborate, gain leadership experience and, of course, have fun.

Dunphy’s most visible role was with the band. He traveled to so many road games and tournaments that he jokes that his young daughter grew up on a band bus. Dunphy had one of the best seats in the house for both of the historic Men’s Basketball NCAA championships, in 1985 and 2016. Band alumni still refer to him affectionately as “Aldo,” a nickname he was given in 1979 after a character in a popular series of commercials.

George Moroney ’85 COE served in a variety of leadership positions during his four years in the band and says that the experience served him well on his career path toward his current position as senior manager for Mission Application Development at Lockheed Martin. “Aldo gave me leadership opportunities that have affected my whole professional career. He helped us by setting guidelines, establishing rules, and then backing out and letting us see how things would go.”

The de facto leader of the band alumni, Moroney forged lifelong friendships among band members (the even met his wife through a band connection) and says his relationship with Dunphy has only deepened through the years. “Each of us has a short list of the people who have had a major influence and impact on our lives, and for many of us, that list starts with John Dunphy.”

Mark Bowers ’77 CLAS, who was president of the band in 2016–17, stresses that the welcoming, inclusive tone Dunphy set for the band made it a respite from the rigors of academic life. “Aldo wanted us to work hard, but not to take ourselves too seriously,” he says. He recalls the time in 2013 when the band traveled to Buffalo, N.Y., to support the basketball team in the first round of the NCAA tournament. The team was scheduled to leave their hotel at 9 p.m., and alumni and fans were assembled in the lobby to offer a rousing send-off. As they waited, band members suddenly spotted their director riding the escalator up to the mezzanine level and then descending with a mischievous look.

“He said, ‘I have an idea,’” recalls Bowers. “And the next thing you know, we’re all on the escalators going up and down playing pep music before the team showed up. It was very spontaneous—moment and very witty, and it was that kind of thing that helped define the character of the band.”

Though Dunphy hasn’t made any grand plans for his retirement, he is looking forward to spending time with his eight children, 15 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. He will also, undoubtedly, stay involved through the band alumni events that Moroney organizes. Every year, when the basketball team has games that fall during holiday breaks, Moroney and others will organize a night to bring alumni to get the horn out of the attic and play in support of the team. “Aldo also tells us to work hard, but not to take ourselves too seriously.”

For 38 years, John Dunphy has “faced the music,” directing bands at every major Villanova event, including Commencement this past May.

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Through his love of the performing arts and his confidence in young people, Dunphy has nurtured the growth of a variety of talented student groups.