

# Leonard Falcone

Solid Brass by Rita Griffin Comstock

Biography

## Biography

*Leonard Vincent Falcone was born April 5, 1899 in Roseto Valfortore, a Province of Foggia in Italy, one of Dominico and Maria Filippa (Finelli) Falcone's seven children. Leonard began his musical career in 1908 at the age of nine by playing the alto horn in the prestigious town band (known as the Roseto Valfortore Band or the "Banda Municipale") directed by the famous Donato Donatelli, Neapolitan Bandmaster.*

*Leonard's brother, Nicholas, was also a member of the band. Nicholas emigrated to the United States in 1912 in order to pursue a career in music. In 1915, at the advent of World War I, Leonard joined him. Nicholas had found work in Ann Arbor as a tailor and clarinet player in a theater. Upon arriving in Michigan, Leonard became a tailor's assistant, and as a trombonist in a silent movie theater band in Ypsilanti that his brother was conducting.*

*In 1917 Leonard Falcone enrolled part-time at Michigan's University School of Music, while continuing to play in theaters. Falcone was granted citizenship in 1924, and in 1926 graduated with a diploma in the violin. During this time, Nicholas had been appointed director of the Varsity Band at the University of Michigan. The Falcone brothers began to develop a sound reputation as musicians and conductors in the Ann Arbor community.*

*The Secretary of Michigan State College contacted the Treasurer of the University of Michigan, and requested his recommendation for the position of Director of Bands at Michigan State. Both brothers were seriously considered for the position, but since Nicholas was settled with a wife and child in Ann Arbor, it was decided that Leonard, the bachelor, should take the position in East Lansing.*

*Leonard became the director of Michigan State College Military Band in September 1927. This band comprised of 65 members and performed for all occasions: military, concerts, and athletics. By the Fall of 1928, the Michigan State Institute of Music and*

*Arts was established, and Falcone was listed as director of the band and instructor of wind instruments and Italian. Although the football team performed poorly during the 1916-1932 football seasons, the band steadily built a strong reputation.*

*Falcone reintroduced open-air concert performances to the College in 1930. These events proved very popular, and by 1934 the band was performing before audiences as large as 3,000. The band made 54 public appearances in 1930-1931. While accompanying the Spartan Football team to Georgetown University in Washington D.C., the band had the opportunity to perform on the White House lawn for President Hoover on October 31, 1930.*

*In 1935, Nicholas was forced to take medical leave for one month from his position as director of the University of Michigan Band. Leonard agreed to take over his brother's responsibilities for this month. The treatment, however, became prolonged, and for one year Leonard maintained full duties as band director for both institutions.*

*With the ever-increasing popularity of the M.S.C. band open-air concerts, a donation from the graduating class of 1937 of \$2,500 made it possible to construct the Band Shell in 1938. In 1941 M.S.C. hosted the Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association's State Festival where the Band performed its first concert in a newly constructed auditorium during the event which attracted crowds of 5,000.*

*During WWII, Falcone opted to enlist into the army to avoid being drafted mid-term. But by October 1943 Falcone had returned full-time to the College and resumed his duties as director and professor. It was during this period that the Concert Band, due to the depleted numbers of male members, recruited female players. This remained unchanged after the war, as women became active members in the music community. But, since women could not be members of the marching band, the Concert band and the Marching Band became separate units in 1946.*

*On Sunday, December 19, 1948, Leonard married Miss Betty Beryl Cromer, a high school teacher who met Leonard while a graduate student performing in the Concert Band. They had two daughters: Mary Beryl, born August 6, 1950, and Cecilia, born May 25, 1952. On January 17, 1953 Falcone celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary as Director of MSU Bands at a large banquet held in his honor.*

*The Concert Band began a series of successful tours in 1951, most notably the "Cap and Gown" series which commenced in 1954. Falcone was eager to bring the same high regard had by the Concert Band to the Marching Band. This attention soon came with M.S.C.'s 1953 entrance into the Big Ten Competition, and the football team's bid to the 1954 Rose Bowl. The Michigan State University Marching Band performed in the 1954 Rose Bowl, as well as the 1956 Rose Bowl, which was televised across the nation.*

*In 1960, the Band Shell was demolished to make way for Ernst Bessey Hall and the adjacent parking ramp. Although reassurances were made that a new open-air venue would be constructed for the Concert Band performances, the plans never came into fruition, and subsequently the attendance for the outdoor concerts diminished as the seasonal performances moved from site to site with no fixed location.*

*Nevertheless, in 1964 the Marching Band represented the State of Michigan during Michigan Week Activities at the New York World's Fair. In 1965 the Band once more represented the State during Lyndon B. Johnson's Inaugural Parade, as well as made a third trip to the Rose Bowl.*

*In April 1966 Falcone submitted his request for retirement. This request was granted and on July 1, 1967, Falcone's retirement from the University took effect, exactly forty years after his arrival at the institution on July 1, 1927. During the course of his tenure, Falcone's original single 65 piece Military Band developed into four units: the 175 piece Marching Band, the 115 piece Concert Band, the 100 piece Activity Band, and the Spartan Brass.*

*Retirement from the University did not end Falcone's profession in music. Throughout his career he had been involved with organizations and in events outside of MSU, and as Professor Emeritus Falcone continued to accept invitations to be a guest conductor, soloist, advisor or adjudicator at innumerable concerts, festivals and contests across the country. He also continued to teach courses for the MSU Music department until the early 1970s. During 1971, Falcone conducted and toured internationally with the Blue Lake Fine Arts International Exchange Program. In 1976 the Music Camp dedicated its new Band Pavilion in his honor.*

*Notably, Falcone was a prominent Baritone artist, one of the few in the country, and was lauded for bringing the previously obscure instrument into the public eye. The artist made numerous solo appearances across the country beginning in 1929, and even made three recordings of baritone solos with Joseph Evans, MSU pianist. Falcone also collaborated with the First Division Band Course company with the publication of The Leonard V. Falcone Baritone Solo Series and The Leonard V. Falcone Trombone Solo Series.*

*Falcone was also a published writer. In 1932, he wrote "How to Choose a Solo for the Baritone" for the Educational Music Journal, and published nine more articles on bands and band instruments that appeared in the School Musician, Instrumentalist, and the Music Educators Journal. He also worked on transcribing and arranging music for band, particularly the works of Italian composers. Falcone was strongly affiliated with various other professional organizations such as the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, Kappa Kappa Psi, the American Bandmaster's Association, the College Band Directors National Association, and the Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association.*

*In recognition of these endeavors, Falcone was awarded an honorary degree of "Doctor of Fine Arts" in 1978, marking 50 years of involvement with MSU. Although this award is usually reserved for figures not affiliated with the University, it was argued that Falcone's tireless duties outside MSU and as Professor Emeritus should easily entitle him to consideration.*

*In June of 1985, at the age of 86, Falcone arranged to tour his native province in Italy with the "Falcone Alumni Band" a group which had been recently formed by some of his former students. That May, however, just before embarking on the trip, Leonard Falcone died in his East Lansing home. The tour continued in his honor.*

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