

Nellie Bechtel - a cornet soloist from Maryland

Gavin Holman, 6 April 2026

Nellie Simmons Bechtel was born in Baltimore on 26 February 1895 to her parents James Giffen Bechtel and Annie Margaret (née Holmes). James worked in the electro-plating industry in the city.

Nellie's first appearance as a performer was at an entertainment given to the inmates at the Baltimore City Jail on New Year's Day, 1914, which consisted of moving pictures, singing and band music.

Nellie had joined Daniel Feldman's City Park Band for the 1914 season, and was featured as a cornet soloist in their concerts that summer at the Federal Hill Park. She appears to have had one favourite solo each season – in 1914 it was the "*Heart and Hand Polka*" (Rollinson). For 1915 it was "*Sea Flower Polka*" (Rollinson).

On the evening of Wednesday 21 July 1915, Nellie led community singing at Carroll Park, supported by a couple of young boys on cornet, two of her music pupils. This had quickly become a regular ad-hoc event for Wednesday evenings in the city.



Nellie Bechtel in 1914

Nellie provided several cornet solos supporting a meeting of the Maryland Women's Suffrage Association on 1 May 1916.

The park concerts continued with Feldman's Band, at various locations throughout Baltimore, including the Courthouse Plaza, Clifton Park, and Fort McHenry. Nellie's 1916 cornet solo piece was "*Honeysuckle Polka*" (Casey). During the season from 21 May to 6 September the band gave 111 concerts. Other soloists in the band had also been featured - on euphonium, viola, trombone, flute, piccolo, xylophone, clarinet and trumpet.

On 31 October 1916, Nellie played cornet solos at a Halloween Mask Party at Mount Washington, together with the Monkton Orchestra.

New Year's Day 1917 saw Nellie, with other performers, giving a musical entertainment at the Maryland House of Correction.

Before the summer band season started in 1917, Nellie fulfilled some other engagements, including as a guest soloist with the Baltimore Letter Carrier's Band, in April at Bayview.

Feldman's Band, with Nellie as soloist, started their 1917 season – her chosen solo that year was "*Hazelene Polka*" (Hazel) - though she did perform others selected on the day, including the "*Three Star Polka*" (Bagley).

She concluded 1917 with playing "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" to support a patriotic address, in November, and took part in a concert for the inmates at the Baltimore Penitentiary on Christmas Day.



Before her 1918 concert season with Feldman's Band, Nellie played patriotic airs at a supper for the Men's Club of Holy Innocents' Protestant Episcopal Church, in April, and played "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" during the unfurling of a flag honouring service members of that same church, in May.

In August 1918, Nellie performed solos, with the Fort McHenry Band, at a lawn fête at Fort McHenry Hospital. Another patriotic solo was given at the Holy Innocents' church in September.

In February 1919 Nellie played at a birthday party at Sparrow's Point, with her accompanist being her mother.

In January 1920 Nellie played the wedding march for the marriage of Edna Muth and Clarence Taylor, in Baltimore.



Feldmann's City Park Band, Baltimore

Nellie was still playing with Feldman's Baltimore City Park Band in 1921 for the season, but was also involved with the Dorothy Decker Female Orchestra in the city.

In spring 1922, Nellie took part in concerts with the John Hopkins Orchestra, a series of events held at various hospitals in and around the city. On 21 May she was surprised by a performance of Mendelssohn's "*Wedding March*" during the concert which honoured her and her new husband, Maurice Nicoll, who was the first trombone of the orchestra (Nellie playing third trumpet).

Nellie's last known appearance was when she made a radio broadcast on WGBA Baltimore on 20th November 1924, when she played "*Melody in F*" (Rubenstein) and "*The Lost Chord*" (Sullivan).



Nellie Bechtel, 1921

It is assumed that her musical career was replaced by family - Norton Albert Nickol (1923), Giffen Bechtel Nickol (1924) and Annie M. Nickol (1926).

Nellie died, at home in Baltimore, on 11 December 1947.