

Quarter Notes

Published by the Gateway City Big Band, Inc.

Dennis Owsley, Editor

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Gateway City Big Band **MISSION STATEMENT**

The *Gateway City Big Band, Inc.*, a non-profit corporation, provides advanced jazz education and performance opportunities for participating musicians. Through its performances, it strives to promote public awareness of the “big band” style of music, to encourage and support music education at the secondary school level, and to assist other non-profit groups with fundraising.

Gateway City Big Band Schedule

Consult our website at:

<http://www.gatewaycitybigband.com/>

Saturday, March 22, 2014

The Eppinger Foundation invites you to the American Legion Hall in Columbia, Illinois (1 Memorial Drive) to hear us play from 7-9 pm. It's FREE!

Saturday, June 7, 2014

After taking a year off for construction, St. Timothy's Episcopal Church (808 N. Mason Road, 1/2 mile south of Olive) is once again hosting its outdoor concert for the whole family. We'll play from 7:00-9:30 and food is available for purchase, including delicious homemade desserts. Call 314-434-5906 for information and table reservations.

Saturday, June 28, 2014

Come join us at the Kirkwood Area Arts Council's "Making Music" concert series from 7:00-9:00 at Kirkwood Park (Geyer and Adams Roads) in the Kirkwood Lions Amphitheater. It's FREE and food is available for purchase.

President's Message

The *Gateway City Big Band*, unbelievably, is in its 48th year. There are many great things about being in the band, but without question the best is being able to perform and make great friendships with so many awesome people. We are each other's best fans.



The worst thing about being part of a community that endures seemingly forever is that eventually you lose some of those great friends. In recent months we have lost three of our great friends.

Herb Booth sat in many times with us before joining on a full time basis in 1994. He was our trumpet jazz specialist through December of 2010 when he retired for health reasons. I'm sure you all remember him – he was our own Harry James, performing “You Made Me Love You” frequently and flawlessly. A finger print on

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President's Message (cont.)

Herb's horn never lasted for more than a few minutes, and the music in his book was in perfect order. He was a perfectionist - and that showed in his playing. When



he walked out front to take a solo he had total command of the audience and not a note was misplaced. Herb was larger than life, and stories about him will be repeated as long as the band exists.

Joe Pike was the long-term drummer for the Sentimental Journey Band. It may not be well known, but the **GCBB** and Sentimental Journey are the friendliest of competitors. We substitute in each other's bands and have many long-term friendships among our members. Joe filled in on drums for us for years and we helped him out many times. He was a prince of a guy with a warm personality and someone you could totally trust.

Over the years Joe became a one-man referral service for musicians - he was constantly putting musicians and bands together. I first met him when he recruited me to play in a pit orchestra for a production of Music Man in the mid '70's. I was ultimately recruited for the **GCBB** as a result of a relationship made during that show. Karen Sharp was referred by Joe to the **GCBB** after he met her in another band. I wonder how many others were helped by Joe's continuous interest in the musicians around him.

Harold "Larry" Walton was an excellent woodwind player who frequently filled in as a substitute over many years. Our own

Jerry Wood introduced us to Larry, as both were long-term members of the 571st Air Force Band. I recently learned he also played banjo - I wish we'd had a chance to hear that as he was excellent at everything he did.

We've lost a number of other guys over the years and we still talk about their talent, accomplishments, and idiosyncrasies. Their memories live on with us; and so will Herb, Joe, and Larry's.

Ballrooms in St. Louis

During the first half of the 20th century, St. Louis had a number of ballrooms or dance halls for citizens who liked to dance. In the teens and twenties, Pythian Hall at Lucas and Compton, was the major black community dance venue. Around 1920, an establishment called the Dreamland Ballroom was built at 3115-23 Olive (just where Olive branches off Lindell near Grand). By 1925, it was called the Arcadia Ballroom and was managed by Joe Ternes and Paddy Harmon.

Most of the big name St. Louis Dance bands played there, including the Gene Rodemich orchestra and the Conley-Silverman orchestras. The group that was featured there by late 1925 was called "The Arcadian Serenaders," a New Orleans band with Wingy Manone on trumpet. On September 8, 1925, saxophonist Frank Trumbauer brought a band into the Arcadia that had cornetist Bix Beiderbecke and clarinetist Pee Wee Russell. Other bands that played at the Arcadia were the Joe Lechner, the Les Carlbach and the Ted Jansen bands.

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St. Louis Ballrooms (cont.)

Trumbauer's band also played at the Racquet Club. Only the Arcadian Serenaders were recorded.

Other dance halls during the 1920's and 1930's were Trimp's Ambassador Ballroom at 4458 Delmar, the Coronado Hotel that featured the Herbert Berger Orchestra and the Castle Ballroom at 29th and Ewing that featured Dewey Jackson's Musical Ambassadors. Both the Trimp's band and the Berger band were recorded. Dewey Jackson was recorded with musicians he used on the excursion boats on the river. The Coronado Hotel, now a St. Louis University dormitory, was the site of the debut of bassist Jimmy Blanton with Duke Ellington's orchestra in the Fall of 1939.

During this time, Sauter's Park, the Dance Box, the Westminster Ballroom, the Imperial Ballroom and the Castle Ballroom offered dancing. Forest Park Highlands was open during the summers for dancing. The Pigeon Hole was in East St. Louis.

The Plantation Club offered the best wages and working conditions for black musicians, the first venue in the city to offer top black entertainment for whites in St. Louis. While white patrons danced to black bands on the riverboats, the Plantation was a lavish affair with a chorus line and elaborate floorshows. The Plantation Club opened at Vandeventer and Enright in 1931. In 1940, it moved to 3617 Delmar. Throughout its history, the club was owned and managed by the Scarpelli brothers. It was a whites-only establishment, featuring black bands and arrangers. In 1934, the Jeter-Pillars Orchestra was at the club and remained until 1944 when the George

Hudson band replaced them. Eddie Johnson brought his band into the Plantation and remained until it closed in 1947.

During the late 1930's, the Showboat Ballroom featured tenor saxophonist Forrest Crawford, who had been with Bunny Berigan. Jordan Chambers reopened the Showboat as the Club Riviera in 1944 as a black alternative to the Club Plantation. Club Riviera continued to bring in nationally known big bands until 1949.

The Casa Loma Ballroom at 3354 Iowa opened and remains today as a place where swing dancing can be heard. The Kenton Orchestra had an engagement at the Casa Loma in December 1942. During that engagement, the St. Louis-born and Belleville-raised trumpeter Buddy Childers auditioned with the band at age 17 and took over the lead trumpet chair.

In 1942, the Arcadia was renamed Tune Town. Stan Kenton set an attendance record in his first engagement at Tune Town. Charlie Menees said that he celebrated by going back to the Claridge Hotel with the band and taking off his pants, dropping his trousers and doing a celebration dance in some polka dot boxer shorts. Tune Town burned down in 1947.

One other ballroom was the West End Waiters that featured the Buggs Roberts Orchestra. Miles Davis noted that if it moved, Roberts would write an arrangement for it. Apparently, nobody improvised in that band.

Dennis Owsley, Editor
Author of **City of Gabriels, the Jazz History of St. Louis 1895-1974**

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Newsletter



The **Quarter Notes** is the official publication of the *Gateway City Big Band, Inc.*, a non-profit organization. It is published quarterly in November, February, May and August.

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