

Sparks Edition

JAZZ IN BOSTON IN MID-50'S

by Crystal Joy Albert

As a child of the depression era and growing up in New York City, I took piano lessons which were subsidized by President Roosevelt's WPA cultural programs. Then in the 1950s, I attended Boston University. There were jazz musical opportunities in the downtown area which were both a joy for me—pardon my play on words here—and a chance to offset some of my educational expenses.

In the year 1953, Boston rivaled NYC with clubs featuring the hottest current jazz artists. I was fortunate to have played in most of them. One of the first was George Wein's Storyville in Copley Plaza Hotel. The policy there was no singing allowed before 8 p.m. So, I did a piano interlude from 6-8 before the show which featured the likes of Lester Young, Burl Ives, Erroll Garner and George Shearing while I was there.

Subsequently, I left that job for one where I could sing and play piano as the intermission entertainment at the Hi Hat Nightclub. Broadcaster Symphony Sid did a remote broadcast and called the Hi Hat, the "Jazz Corner of the World." He was hyperbolically correct. Across the street were three other lively clubs, The Savoy, featuring traditional jazz; Wally's Paradise, featuring big bands; and Eddie's Wigwam featuring calypso and small groups. This was in 1953 and during spring, summer and fall.

I played the Hi Hat opposite the hottest names in jazz—including Sonny Stitt, Ella Fitzgerald, Max Roach, Clifford Brown, Carmen McRae, King Pleasure, Slim Gaillard and many others who came through town. Anyone you could see in NYC, you could see in Boston!

Allow me a couple of personal stories. I was intermission pianist at Hi Hat when Ella Fitzgerald was booked for performances. There was only a small dressing room which I shared with Ella. She was gracious and gave me good advice about performance and pleasing the public. Of course, she brought her own group, pianist John Lewis, and bassist Ray Brown for her show but I enjoyed my association for those few days.

I was performing at Hi Hat when Slim Gaillard was booked. (It was only when I moved to Pensacola that I learned that Slim grew up here—a fact that he never mentioned.) Slim was a novelty act in that he played guitar, could play the first portion of Debussy's *Claire de Lune* on piano with palms upward. He was composer of *Flat Foot Floogie*, *Straighten Up and Fly Right*, and *Cement Mixer—Putti, Putti*, among others. It was rare that my mother would attend any jazz acts or come to see me perform. But, on this particular night, mother was in attendance. Slim asked me to be an accessory to his act. To my mother he said, "And I want you to come, too, as chaperone." I thought he was more

interested in my mother than me, but of course, neither of us seriously contemplated accepting his offer.

Another personal story involves Eddie's on Mass. Avenue across from the Hi Hat. In 1953-54 the star performer there was Gene Walcott, a singer, violinist and storyteller who packed the house nightly. He retired from entertainment and became a Muslim and changed his name to Louis Farrakhan. I was one of the acts to follow him!

Boston in the '50s was the place to be!

This was an interesting time in my life and activity was such that I discontinued my college career only to complete my studies at a later time. I subsequently went "on the road" for a musical stint in Miami and then had opportunity to appear on TV with Steve Allen on *The Tonight Show*. But that's the subject of a future column.



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Editor's note: Crystal came to Pensacola in 1995 as three brothers and their families had settled in Navarre. She soon joined the Jazz Society and served as chair of the JazzFest performance committee from 2000 to 2016. She was a Jazz Society board member from 2000 to 2017 and served as board president from 2007 to 2016.

We look forward to her future columns about her jazz adventures.

For further details about the Boston jazz scene, see Richard Vacca's book, *The Boston Jazz Chronicles; Faces, Places and Nightlife 1937-1962*. This book is available at the Jazz Room, thanks to gift from Crystal. Crystal's three CDs--one is from her early career and two are more contemporary—are available for check-out in the library Jazz Room.

JAZZ ROOM UPDATE

by Norman Vickers

New portraits of Bulee "Slim" Gaillard and Dr. Don Shirley, both Pensacola natives will soon be added to the Jazz Room at the downtown West Florida Public Library. A portion of Shirley's life was depicted in the recent movie, *The Green Book*.

JAZZ PENSACOLA- A LITTLE GEM IN PENSACOLA, FL

by Justine Ward



Photo courtesy of Norman Vickers; September 2018 Jazz Gumbo

I moved to Florida for the water, and had no idea there was such a thing as a Jazz Society, nor did I realize that we had some of the best musicians in the country who lived and worked in the Pensacola Area. It just happened that I ended up attending a Jazz Gumbo, and there I was sitting in a magnificent environment at Seville Quarter. The music was perfect for me. It was Big Band Music and the band was wonderful, also intermingled with the band were some local college students. I was simply blown away and felt so blessed that all of this was at my disposal. I joined immediately and have attended almost every program since that night. Since then I have been privileged to listen to some of the greatest performance that anyone could imagine. Big Band, Dixieland, Gypsy Music, and many more. No need for me to try and list them, as all of you were there and know what great music our musicians can provide. I have learned about the history of the organization, and about the background of some of our musicians and all of their accomplishments. I have the greatest respect and admiration for all of our talented musicians and for those who started this organization as well as those who have worked to make Jazz Pensacola all that it is today. It is a great organization and I feel proud and honored to be a member of this little-known GEM in Pensacola.

However, we are in a city that is in a period of change and growth, and Jazz Pensacola must also change and grow. Many of you may say "Jazz" is dead, but that is not acceptable to me. If we love this music then we must make it grow. Jazz music is being taught to students 7-12 grade in many parts of the country in the schools and by Jazz enthusiast in Kansas City, Tampa, Mobile, LA, etc. I heard one teacher at a Program in KC say, "If we don't teach them Gershwin, who will"? Jazz Pensacola needs to take part in this growing trend. I know we have helped students with a contest for music scholarships, but something is wrong because it seems few want to try out and many are repeat contestants. I love these contests for the students, but they are not well attended. Jazz members need to attend jazz events. After

all part of being a performer is the applause. Bigger crowds will mean more enthusiasm.

Personally, I would like for us to make a goal to be one of the best Jazz Societies in the US, and Pensacola to become a well-known city for Jazz Music. I think we have the talent right here to start that campaign. I would like to see Pensacola be as well-known for Jazz as New Orleans or any other city in the United States. You make think this is impossible, but we know that nothing is impossible if you really want to make something happen. It will require working with the City of Pensacola, lots of promotional work, and most of all willingness from all of us to make it happen. Being a member of the Pensacola Jazz Society needs to mean something to the musicians and the establishments that hire them. That means every member needs to support Jazz Music wherever it is played in the City. We have to support it with our attendance, time, and money to make a real difference. I realize that not everyone will want this goal, but it is a reality that we must grow along with Pensacola, and it is our opportunity to move forward with the City. We cannot stay stagnant, because if we don't move forward, we will probably move backward. Yes, it will take money, and for that, I imagine that we will need to participate in some public service work that will help Pensacola as well as the Jazz Society. We could be involved in the education programs, nursing homes, and civic programs. All of this is just a broad idea; I am just hoping to inspire some creative thinking and some enthusiasm to make this little know GEM sparkle a little brighter. 🎷

JAZZ NOTES

by Carolyn Tokson

What's happening in late August? The most innovative happening is the sold-out Vickers-Bruno Jazz House Party with vocalist Giacomo Gates. This is the second of such events here in town. The first was in December of last year with New Orleans jazz trumpeter, Duke Heitger. What an evening in the old tradition of jazz house parties that has sadly fallen by the way! Thanks to Norman Vickers, founder of Jazz Pensacola and Board Member Paul Bruno for bringing it back.

If you missed the July Jazz Pensacola Gumbo with the Camara Kambon Trio, you can catch a replay August 26 in Mobile at MOJO's (Mystic Order of the Jazz Obsessed) when Camara will look at "Keith Jarrett: Piano Genius". It a marvelous program which explores the influence Jarrett's music had on this Emmy award winning pianist and composer who plays with the house band at our Jazz Jams.

Brunch is the ever popular place to be on Sundays, and we have three options locally. The Curt Bol Band who is entertaining us at the August Gumbo is at the Five Sisters Blues Cafe for the next few Sundays and Kathy Lyon is offering some of your favorite jazz melodies at Seville Quarter. Jim Armstrong joins her on guitar. Al Alverado is on the schedule at Mc Guire's Irish Pub. Joe Occhipinti and his

Jazzabouts are at the Drowsy Poet on Mondays and Fridays from 11 til 1PM.

Saxophonist Austin Paul, Jr, former winner of the 2011 and 2012 Student Competition, is in town between gigs. He closed out 2018 with his own show at the famous Apollo Theater in New York City and was on Bahama Paradise Cruises for a while. After a vacation in Paris, he is home playing with the Ben Lofton Family and at various places. He will be featured guest with Gino Rosario at Tuesday Night Jazz on August 20 and at the Cigar Factory on August 21 before he heads to Orlando for a four month tour with Disney Cruises. Gino Rosaria continues to bring us his Tuesday night Jazz At Lili Marlene's.

Jazz impresaria Sheila Green brings trumpeter Lin Roundtree to It's Personal by Sheila on Sunday August 25. The month closes out with the 4th annual Gulf Coast Summer Fest Jazz Edition on Saturday August 31 and Sunday September 1 at the Community Maritime Park. This is an extravaganza of smooth jazz and promises to bring in a large crowd.

Mark your calendars ahead for Jazz Pensacola's September 16 Gumbo featuring the music of Nobius with a program exploring the journey of Jazz to Motown. September 22 finds Alex Bugnon, pianist at It's Personal by Sheila. Then hold September 26 when Ellen Vinson will be with Bobby van Deusen for Jazz at Jackson's from 5-9 PM. This duo always provides an evening of elegant entertainment. The October 21 Gumbo highlights the music of Nora Jones with vocalist Isabel Schrack. Foo Foo Fest is coming! November 4, Jazz Pensacola and Foo Foo Fest present 2019 Swing with Big Bad Voodoo Daddy at Vinyl. Tickets went on sale August 9; you can access the link at www.jazzpensacola.com. Congratulations go to our president, board and grant writers for the hard work they have done to secure the ACE grant for Foo Foo Fest and their innovative idea to bring such a group to Pensacola. Please visit our website at www.jazzpensacola.com for an updated calendar of events in the area. 🎷

STUDENT JAZZ COMPETITION WINNER UPDATE

by Carolyn Tokson

Elisha Miller, a student vocalist winner in both the 2016 and 2017 Jazz Pensacola Student Competitions has recently returned from a Study Abroad program jointly sponsored by the University of West Florida and the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She is entering her senior year and is considering continuing her vocal education at the Cleveland Institute of Music. She is also looking into auditions in New York, both for Broadway and opera companies as well as performance in competitions. Elisha is the music director at St. Marks United Methodist Church and a music teacher here in Pensacola. She writes a blog at <https://elishamillermusic.com/blog> 🎷

SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

by Carolyn Tokson



Zarzaur Law, P.A., a new sponsor to Jazz Fest 2019, is a Pensacola based firm that is well known for winning car accident cases and specializing in personal injury law. Mr. Joe Zarzaur is one of only a few Board Certified Civil Trial Specialists in the state of Florida and has won record jury verdicts in both Escambia and Santa Rosa County. His Pensacola office includes an on staff physician consultant and preset and paralegal team. His "I hate Joe Zarzaur" brand campaign has made his name and face readily recognizable in the area. During the monthly Pensacola Gallery Night events, Zarzaur Law hosts "Legal Graffiti." "Legal Graffiti" is an opportunity for anyone to make a donation and then create artwork on the (recycled billboard vinyl covered) side of the Zarzaur Law office building using spray paint. The event raises money for non-profits & charities within the area. Donations are matched by the firm and given to the charity of choice.

Learn more about why careless drivers hate Joe Zarzaur at zarzaurlaw.com 🎷

ANNOUNCING "MISS SUNSHINE"

by Carolyn Tokson



Photo courtesy of Alice Crann Good. Myrl Eisinger poses for a picture at the August 2018 Jazz Jam

Myrl Eisinger is our "Miss Sunshine". If you know of a Jazz Pensacola member or volunteer who is ill or has experienced a death in the family, please contact her at johneisinger@bellsouth.net She will send out a card to let folks know we are thinking of them and will notify Sparks members. 🎷

UPCOMING EVENTS

- August 19, 2019** **Jazz Gumbo**
The Music of Al Jarreau
Phineas Phogg's
6:30-9:00
- Sept 16, 2019** **Jazz Gumbo**
Nobius: From Jazz to Motown
Phineas Phogg's
6:30-9:00
- Oct.7, 2019** **Jazz Jam**
The Vineyard on 12th Avenue
6:30-9:00
- Oct. 21, 2019** **Jazz Gumbo**
Isabelle Schrack does Nora Jones
Phineas Phogg's
6:30-9:00
- Nov. 4, 2019** **Big Bad Voodoo Daddy**
Foo Foo Fest Event
Vinyl Music Hall
Doors Open at 6:00
Tickets: \$25

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE THE LIFE OF THE PARTY?

by Carolyn Tokson



Photo courtesy of Ali Egan. February 2019 Super Jazz Gumbo

Would you like to be the life of the party? Sponsor a Jazz Jam for \$300 or a Gumbo for \$400. You can do it alone or with assistance from friends. It's a great way to celebrate a birthday, anniversary or any special occasion. Sparks members sponsored two Jazz Gumbos last fiscal year. All donations are tax deductible. Contact Alice Crann Good by telephone at 850-433-8382 or email at info@jazzpensacola.com. 

Visit the Jazz Room at the Spring St. branch of the West Florida Public Library. You can check out books, CD's, and many other materials. We are one of only two jazz rooms in public libraries in the US.

Check out our website which offers blogs by our president Fred Domulot (an important one about jazz concert etiquette), former president Roger Villines, and book and CD reviews by Dr. Norman Vickers. There are great photos and videos as well as information about Jazz Pensacola. There's a great calendar listing venues for jazz all over the area. That's www.jazzpensacola.com.

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