

## JAZZ IN JEDDAH SAUDI ARABIA 1998-2002

by Art Carnick ("Arturo")



Photographed above: Art "Arturo" Carnick

It was a late summer's evening as the jumbo jet meandered over the Red Sea and began its decent towards the Arabian Desert on to Jeddah Saudi Arabia an "invitation only" country for Westerners. I was going to be an infidel in this mysterious land. What little worldly possessions weren't locked up in storage were packed into suitcases and boxes on the plane as I headed to that port city which is considered "loose" by Sharia law standards. Two years previous I had accumulated substantial medical debt and was widowed. The chemistry business by day and music business by weekend just didn't seem to be helping my financial burden until this providential chance to set up a Quality Control lab for Sheik Abdul Rachman Fakieh came along. I was middle aged and guessed it was high time to forgo the weekend warrior music scene and get totally serious about generating cash. I was leaving behind all my classical guitar training; some wonderful pop, rock, Nashville swing, and Latino memories and was walking away from weekends of playing Dixieland Jazz at Harrah's, the Americana, and the Grand along the Mississippi river. I also left behind my guitars as I had heard that although the Oud was accepted for sword dances and such, most Western Music was "haram" or forbidden. I did buy a Gypsy Kings CD in Europe on my way over as I had heard flamenco music was acceptable in some circles; however, there were no concerts or open forums here, and anything along those lines was going to have to be private.

I stepped off the plane and was whisked to a 5 star hotel, and noticed few folks in suits and ties, mostly thobes with head gear and ladies covered from head to toe in black abayas. I quietly checked in, struggled to sleep due to jet lag, but finally managed to doze off. Later the Sheik put me up in a private compound and pretty much let us workers and expatriates do what we wanted as long as we confined it to the walls surrounding the compound. The only music was a radio station in Cypress playing pop, or a local radio station

giving Koranic guidance.

It was a six day a week job and we worked 8-10 hour shifts. All businesses had to shut down 5 times a day for prayers and other Sharia law constraints. About the only thing "fun" allowed was shopping or going to bookstores... no movie theaters, no bars, no pubs, no public gathering without the permission of the authorities and approval by the religious police. So I was out shopping at one of the malls and noticed there was a music store and purchased a cheap guitar so I'd have something to do at night and on Fridays (the holy day). One of the folks at the compound found out I played guitar and put me in touch with three masterful musicians: a British trumpeter, an English pianist and a Scottish clarinet player. They loved Dixieland Jazz and could play it as well as anything I'd heard around New Orleans and asked if I was interested in playing some gigs around the city. This surprised me as I thought parties and such were probably on the forbidden list. However, I hadn't thought of the embassies and certain private residences. So when I took my first 6 month holiday back to the US I went to the storage locker, retrieved my old Godin Multiac electric classical guitar and brought it back to Jeddah. I managed to get it past the customs officer by explaining that I worked for Sheik Fakieh and he was good buddies with King Fahad. Soon I was rehearsing with the Brits and the Scot and they found a Lebanese drummer. We expanded from Dixieland to some big band jazz tunes. Most Eastern music in the area is different from Western music in that you pick a theme and sort of jam around the idea. So you could do a song called "Habibi" which means "dearest" and be singing about your mom; and ten minutes later you could do a song called "Habibi" which would be about your wife. I guess you only had to know a couple of songs unlike the Western parties where you had to know at least 30 to 60. I was in charge of the arranging and put together a song book which I called "Jeddah Jazz" and we used it for four years.

We ended up playing the embassies and private parties. There is no comingling of the sexes... even McDonald's has a "family" side and a men's side. Most Eastern gatherings (when approved and legal) were for men only; however, at the embassies and private parties on compounds it was pretty much as we do things in Western countries. At a wedding reception building (LayLatie; My Night), we would play for couples, and then the women would party after the wedding until early morning (men having left at midnight). Whether it was a celebration of a Sheik getting an exclusive contract to sell a particular brand of make up or perfume at a mall store, or a gathering at the Greek embassy to feast and celebrate another passing year in the Kingdom; we were in demand to play lots of swinging jazz tunes... I was thrilled to

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be invited to play at least once a month around town. By the way the Greeks play in odd modes and time signatures and except for a swing beat it was jazzy.

One of the last parties I played for was at the British Embassy and there was most any food or drink you wanted. We played everything from Glenn Miller to Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet. I also got to hear a real French Django Jazz band play.

Sadly, about 4 years into my contract, the party was over due to the tragedy of 9/11. I elected not to renew my contract. I packed up my things and headed back to the US having practiced a lot of classical music on boring evenings and played lots of jazz on the Thursday nights. It was a great opportunity to enhance music skills and when I repatriated to Pensacola I was able to play many classical beach weddings as well as perform for the Jazz Society of Pensacola. I have been privileged to share my music with local jazz greats such as Joe Occhipinti and Roger Villines. It was great to be home and back on my feet again both musically and financially.

Shukran Habibi... that's Arabic for "Thanks Yall"... 🎷

## **A CHAT WITH JOE OCCHIPINTI**

by Carolyn Tokson



A young Joe Occhipinti plays saxophone. Photo by Norman Vickers.

Joe Occhipinti is a modest man who says he is not a musician, and especially not a jazz musician. He plays "melody jazz" playing the melody and improvising on the chord changes. He reveals that he performs the same music he liked when he started playing saxophone in the Pecksville, PA school band in the sixth grade. He continued to play locally in "big band" groups and combos and in the Scranton area. Joe never had any of what he considers "real music education" other than his public school music training. Until, when he was living in NY and going to the jazz clubs like the Metropole listening to Coleman Hawkins and Buddy Rich, he took some lessons from Joe Napoleon who taught him a numbered system for playing jazz so that Joe learned to improvise and harmonize on the chords in the melody. The swing came naturally to him; he didn't have to learn that. After he was drafted and in basic training in

1959-60, he answered a call for auditions for the army band and was accepted. He was sent to Frankfurt, Germany where he played in the 3rd Armoured Division Band.

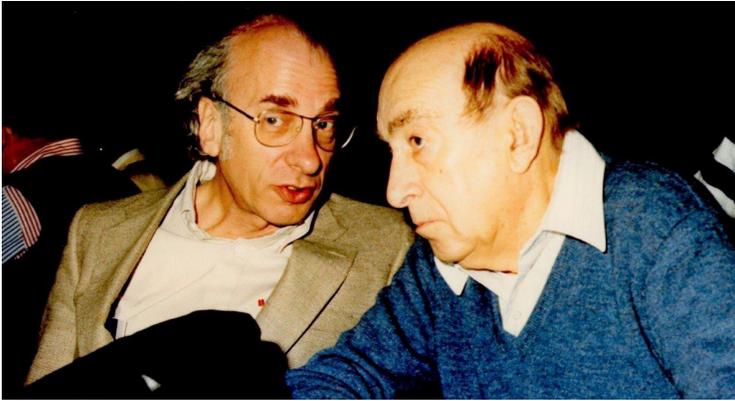
At one point, a friend, John Amoni, who had known him in high school in PA had moved to Pensacola and opened the Warrington Music Shop. John played with Ray Spivey and the Krazy Kats who traveled from one military base to another performing all along the coast and touring from Pensacola to Delaware. John and Joe's mothers were good friends and John knew Joe was still playing his sax. When the sax player in Spivey's band took a civil service job, and the band couldn't find a replacement, John contacted Joe who had just returned from the Newport Jazz Festival. Joe joined the touring band in Columbus, Georgia and finished out the summer tour which ended in Pensacola. Joe says that's when he really learned to play all the songs from the "Great American Song Book". Joe turns poetic when he talks about the ingredients of jazz.... the phrasing, the sound, the swing and using the spacing in the melody. He repeats, "Swing is not a noun". Joe plays what he loves and what his audiences love. He rarely plays anything younger than the late 50's and early 60's. Joe calls himself an "uneducated musician" who never wanted to be a star or a recording artist. He says he didn't know how to do anything else but be a musician. When I mentioned that he had been a "working musician" all these years, he added "in the 'no' business of music". He confesses he has to create either places to play or events to make music. Since he has played countless gigs from Mobile to Panama City, he has become a legendary figure for those who enjoy his particular brand of music.

While Joe down-plays his musical career and education, he is very proud of being a founding member of Jazz Pensacola and the local Sons of Italy chapter, as well as a life long member of the musician's union #777 from Biloxi, a member of the Civic Band for over 40 years, and his years as the Vice President of MOJO (Mystical Order of the Jazz Obsessed) in Mobile. Despite his self-effacing attitude, Jazz Pensacola recognizes Joe's tremendous efforts and presence in the long history of festivals and monthly events since its inception. He brags that "Music is something that I never said 'I'm not going to do this anymore.'" Joe's devotion to the music he loves is apparent in his continued desire to bring this chapter of music to those who already love it and to introduce it to those who may not yet know it. 🎷

Did you know you can sponsor Jazz Pensacola events? Email [info@jazzpensacola.com](mailto:info@jazzpensacola.com) for information on event sponsoring.

## WHEN ART HODES CAME TO PENSACOLA

by F. Norman Vickers



Art Hodes, right, and Dick Hyman chat. Photo by Norman Vickers.

In the early 1980s when the Jazz Society of Pensacola was just getting started, we had made contact with two record producers, George Buck of New Orleans and Gus Statiras of New York City and Tifton, GA. They were both helpful to us in many ways, including advising us on assisting with the jazz collection at the downtown West Florida Public Library.

Jazz pianist Art Hodes (1904-1993) was a favorite of both Buck and Statiras. We learned that he might be available for a weekend and Monday performance. It was a spring weekend and we put him up at a hotel on Pensacola Beach. It was my pleasure to be his sight-seeing guide for the day.

At this point in the story, a little background is in order for those who aren't familiar with his background. He was born in Russia and, as an infant, came to Chicago with his parents. He took piano lessons at Jane Addams Hull House contemporaneously with clarinetist Benny Goodman and bassist Milt Hinton. When he came of age, Hodes played piano in speak-easy joints owned by Chicago mobsters. One of the stories he told me on our sight-seeing tour was occasionally dodging bullets in the joint. Then he moved to New York, had a radio show and was editor of the magazine, *The Jazz Record*, for five years. He starred in a series of TV shows entitled *Jazz Alley* featuring various jazz artists and groups. So, with this background, the reader can imagine Hodes' wealth of stories about various jazz musicians.

We needed some activity for Sunday, so I set up a private event for Sunday afternoon. It was held at the home of neurosurgeon Dr. Troy Tippett. Troy had a grand piano in the living room. It was placed by a glass door overlooking a patio and lush lawn which extended to Bayou Texar. While Hodes was performing, one could look out and watch water-skiers gliding up and down the bayou. When I would subsequently see Art at various national jazz events, he would mention that lovely afternoon.

The culmination of Hodes' visit, of course, was his performance for the Jazz Society members at New World Landing. It was a full house with enthusiastic listeners. We rented a grand piano for the stage at New World Landing and when he performed, in the background there was a

large photograph of the early Pensacola waterfront, about 1900, which covered the entire wall. Record producer George Buck and wife Nina came over from New Orleans for that event.

For further information, see Hodes' performances on YouTube or order his CDs from Jazzology Records. 🎷

## JAZZ PENSACOLA INVOLVED IN STUDENT "JAZZ HANG"

by Carolyn Tokson

Jazz Pensacola and Schmidt's Music were partners in a "Jazz Hang" sponsored by Pace High School and Gulf Breeze High School this month. One hundred forty students participated in the event. Dave Schmidt, vice-president of the Board of Directors funded six clinicians including president of Jazz Pensacola, Fred Domulot, former president, Roger Villines, board member John Link, Rebecca Berry, Jackson Willis, and Tom Latenser to perform for the students before breaking into workshops led by the clinicians. Students from Ransom and Tate High Schools and middle school students from all over the surrounding area attended. Dr. Joe Spaniola from UWF led a workshop for the younger students. Clinicians distributed fliers and discussed the student competition and encouraged the students to take advantage of the \$5 student membership to Jazz Pensacola. There are plans to continue such an activity next year. 🎷

### ATTENTION STUDENT JAZZ MUSICIANS!



You are invited to submit an entry to the

## 2020 Student Jazz Competition

- College Instrumental
- High School Instrumental
- Jazz Vocal

- Three finalists from each Division will perform in the live finals at Phineas Phoggs in Seville Quarter on Monday, March 16, at 6:30 p.m. This event, which will be the March Jazz Gumbo, is free and open to the public.
- Awards for 1st, 2nd and 3rd in each Division, ranging from \$100 to \$500, will be presented at the conclusion of the event.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE IS FRIDAY, February 21, 2020**

Ask your band/chorus director for an application,  
or go to [jazzpensacola.com](http://jazzpensacola.com) to download a PDF.



Questions?  
Send email to [info@jazzpensacola.com](mailto:info@jazzpensacola.com)  
or call (850) 433-8382  
Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-1 p.m.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- Dec. 9, 2019**      **Jingle Jazz**  
North Pole Panic  
Phineas Phogg's  
6:30pm-9:00pm
- Jan. 6, 2020**      **Jazz Jam**  
The Vineyard on 12th Avenue  
6:30pm-9:00pm
- Jan. 20, 2020**      **Jazz Gumbo**  
Jim Andrews plays the work of  
Grover Washington Jr.  
Phineas Phogg's  
6:30pm-9:00pm
- Feb. 3, 2020**      **Jazz Jam**  
The Vineyard on 12th Avenue  
6:30pm-9:00pm
- Feb. 8, 2020**      **Volunteer Meet Up**  
Coffee & Chat  
V. Paul's Italian Ristorante  
10:00am-11:00am

## GET YOUR GIG POSTED ON THE JAZZ PENSACOLA WEBSITE

Are you a working musician? Did you know that you can have your gig posted on the Jazz Pensacola website calendar by contacting our office by email at [info@jazzpensacola.com](mailto:info@jazzpensacola.com) or by calling the office at 850-433-8382. This service by Jazz Pensacola offers a place for local residents and out-of-town visitors to learn about jazz events in the area as well as gives musicians free publicity for their gigs. 🎷

## SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT: APPRIVER

by Carolyn Tokson



AppRiver, a Zix company, protects businesses of all sizes from a long and growing list of online threats. Our cloud-based security, productivity, and compliance technology helps companies communicate and collaborate, stay compliant with laws and regulations, and guard against hacking and data theft. Launched in 2002, AppRiver joined Zix in 2019. The combined company now employs more than 500 people, nearly half of whom work in Gulf Breeze. 🎷

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