

## SOME SYNCOPATED MUSINGS FROM 45 YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL PIANISTIC PRESTIDIGITATION

by Bobby van Duesen



Bobby van Duesen

## INTRODUCTION

By F. Norman Vickers

It is my pleasure to write a brief introductory paragraph for pianist Bobby Van Deusen's column. Most Jazz Pensacola members have their own pleasant memories of encounters with Bobby.

Bobby reminds me that he was been in the Pensacola area for thirty-five years. He has been a proponent of jazz in our area with performances with big band, small-group and solo performances locally and nationally. He has performed on the Mississippi River steamboat, Delta Queen, done session work in Nashville and had an eight-year association with Barbary Coast Jazz Band in Minneapolis. He has performed Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue with various civic band groups nationally. Currently, he has a five night a week gig at Seagar's Restaurant in Sandestin.

Allow me one jazz anecdote to conclude this introduction. Bobby attended Ohio State U. and obtained a degree in music. During his senior year Sammy Davis Junior was on tour and was to perform in Columbus. Bobby was recruited, last minute, to fill in for Davis' pianist who had taken ill. After the performance, Davis complimented him and invited him to finish the tour as a replacement for the regular pianist. And the subsequent performances were equally successful. How's that for a "senior recital?"

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In the beginning... The Red Devil Supper Club was once a 'hot spot' on US 40 coming into Columbus, Ohio from the

east. Leather booths, a full kitchen, and a piano behind the marble topped padded bar. When I got there for my first professional engagement at age 19, thanks to Dave Wheeler (\$25 a night for 5 hours, all the Jack Daniels I could drink), she'd seen better days-- sort of like 'Lola the Showgirl' in the last verse of 'Copacabana'. Faded feathers in her hair, indeed. But on Tuesday nights it was a sort of mecca for young jazz students, who brought their horns and voices and brushes trying to make an impression on the owner, who 'knew some people'. Our 'house' drummer lived right behind the bar, and we would adjourn at 11:00 to sample some imported vegetation and watch 'Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman.' Best jukebox in town, bar none; I wore out the flip side of Errol Garners 'Misty' (Exactly Like You, if you were wondering). Monk, Miles, George Jones, Basie and Elvis all mingled together, ready to play at the drop of a quarter. It's still there, albeit as a 'sports bar', but I always drive by when I'm in Columbus. The Red Devil. Yeah, man.

"Cozy"..At the Top Steak House one fine evening, Cozy Cole strolled in with a lovely companion and sat at the piano bar where I played 5 nights a week. I remember playing a couple of tunes before I asked him what he'd like to hear. "Take the A Train please?", and I jokingly asked him what key he preferred. I played the first chorus ala Ellington, in 3/4, then hit the famous intro lick. Cozy picked up a pair of spoons and started playing with me, at first on the top of the bar, then his glass, then his companion's glass, then the barstool (now he was standing up and making music on whatever was nearby).

Anything was fair game, (booths, chairs, the floor) I was on the 10th chorus and the place was going nuts. He laughed and danced and played and played. When we took it out and everybody in the restaurant was standing up applauding he gave me a wink and a 'yeah baby'. I found out subsequently that he was actually very ill and passed away not long after. It was a fine evening.

"Hoagy"...In 1978, at the Top Steak House, a beautiful, elderly lady sitting at the piano bar asked me to play 'Stardust'. I sensed that the tune meant something to her, so it was a very nice rendition. She told me that she'd been a 'house mother' at Kappa Sigma fraternity at Indiana University in the 20's when Hoagy was there, and that he would have enjoyed the way I played his music. Greatest musical compliment I ever received. 

## A VISION OF JAZZ EDUCATION

by Carolyn Tokson

As I prepared this special issue of our newsletter, I thought about the long history of Jazz Pensacola and its influence in educating the younger population of our area in the marvelous mystique that is jazz. There are many options for young musicians to be involved in Jazz Pensacola and its activities.

First there is the monthly Jazz Jam, now held at the 5 Barrel on Palafox St.. The Jam gives both high school and college students and other amateurs the chance to perform with a live house band of professionals. Students are admitted free and are entitled to bring one guest free. (Presently because of the coronavirus, we have been allowing everyone to come in free. If they wish to make a donation, we are grateful.) Under past “normal” circumstances, we charged an admission fee which was small. Often, other professionals come to sit in just for the fun of playing with other musicians. For many young students, this offers their first opportunity to perform for anyone other than their school band, their teachers or their family. I’ve seen young students who lack confidence come and sit through the Jams several times before getting up to play. Roger Villines has been very helpful in easing the student’s nerves and I see the other musicians looking to follow the new student if they see a concern. Of course, there are mistakes and some missed notes or skipped beats, but the student comes through with a sigh of relief and a bit more confidence. College students seem much more ready to dive in and go for it. They’ve already had years of experience with their high school band or jazz combo and have more of a sense of proficiency.

Our vice-president, Dave Schmidt who owns Schmidt’s Music has frequent contact with the area band directors in the public school system. He has sponsored a “Jazz Hang” which gives high school students a chance to have a workshop with professional musicians. Our president, Fred Domulot, past-president Roger Villines, board member John Link, and Joe Occhipinti, a long-term founding member, have been involved in these events as well as other local musicians who have served as judges in the competition. Last year, Jazz Pensacola also contributed to the funding of an event.

Secondly, we have the Annual Student Competition which asks student musicians to send an mp3 of their work which is reviewed by the judges who select finalists for the competition. Those chosen then perform for a live audience and, after being rated by the judges, receive cash awards to use for their continuing jazz education. This step is a marvelous boost for young musicians who are debating if they have the talent to go into music as a vocation and a reaffirming adventure for those who are in college already studying music as a major. I remember that one student (who went on to win several competitions) mentioned to

me that the \$200 she won at her first competition was a godsend since her father had been unemployed for over a year. Every small increment in following the path of jazz gives the student musician the knowledge that there is a place for them in this genre.

Thirdly, our Jazz Gumbo, which before the coronavirus pandemic occurred on the third Monday of the month, has been a way of highlighting the music of particular artists by offering a program of their music and a narrative which told about the artist’s life and work. This innovation has asked our audiences to treat the event as more of a concert that required active listening rather than simply an evening listening to jazz and talking to friends. It has offered much in the way of educating the members in terms of jazz artists and their work. This month, our Jazz Gumbo is the Student Competition.



Noemi Ruiz on trumpet. Photo by Dean Vanderhoof.

There is also the chance for students to become involved in the activities of Jazz Pensacola as a volunteer for JazzFest and even to become involved as a leader. Presently, Noemi Ruiz, trumpeter and student at UWF, is the person staffing and planning the Musician’s Tent for JazzFest. Having the opinion of a young voice is very beneficial to us in planning events.

Then there is the jazz collection at the downtown West Florida Public Library. Shortly after the society was formed, members approached the library about upgrading their small collection of jazz books and LP recordings. They consulted record producers George Buck of Jazzology Records headquartered in New Orleans and Gus Statiras of New York and Tifton, GA. They also advised the society of jazz CDs and books. When the new addition to the library was built, the late Ralph Knowles made a significant donation to the library which allowed for a jazz room dedicated to the memory of his late wife, Janet. Now the collection of jazz books, CDs and DVDs is valued at \$20,000. There are only two such rooms in public libraries in the US dedicated exclusively to jazz. We have every right to be proud of this unusual educational tool. There is also a mini-art gallery with framed JazzFest posters, paintings, and photographs.

Finally, a recent gift by Robert and Margaret Byrnes to sponsor a fundraising event for the Vickers Artist in Residence Fund (VARF) will make possible having a visiting

artist give a master class and concert for students locally and a public concert for the community as well. This is the second time, the Byrnes have made a donation which allowed us to have an artist in residence event. This artist in residence program can provide yet another avenue for jazz education sponsored by Jazz Pensacola.

These avenues already make a firm foundation for the jazz education which is a primary goal of our jazz society. I, as one board member, think we can explore even more ways to bring jazz to the community. We can build on these present activities and enhance our program even more.

At JazzFest, guitarist and singer, Mike Potters has for years presented a two-hour Kiddie Jam where small children played along with Mike and his guitar on kazoos and harmonicas given to them. Each year the circle has grown and usually 100 children participate. Sadly, due to the virus, we will not have a Kiddie Jam this year. However, as life slowly returns to a healthier environment, I can see us offering concerts to children in the safe setting of our local libraries. Children could listen to a story and then hear live jazz for a short period. In past years, we have had a series of lectures and films at the main branch of the West Florida Public Library. At one point, Crystal Joy Albert was performing short concerts on Tuesday evenings in the library lobby on the grand piano there. A group of the Sparks volunteers has book and CD sales at each seasonable library sales several times during the year. Often Dr. Vickers plays a few tunes which visitors enjoy.

We can build liaisons with other non-profit organizations and community institutions to present joint activities. When I was first involved with our society, the Pensacola Museum of Art and Jazz Pensacola partnered to present an exhibit of photographs of jazz greats by photographer Duncan Schiedt along with an elegant buffet and an evening of music provided by the late Al Martin. Mr. Schiedt, a "play-by-ear" jazz enthusiast provided a few piano solos also. When Crystal Joy Albert was president, she collaborated with UWF to present a piano extravaganza with four dueling pianists. If we think creatively and reach out to other organizations, we can hopefully continue to offer other activities in the future.

So what is necessary to bring about these events? Foresight, passion, hard work and unfortunately cold hard cash. Right now, our nation and local economy has been hit hard. Small 501(c)(3)s like Jazz Pensacola have survived through creative shifting of gears, grants from the state, donations, sponsorships and the generosity of members. We need, more than ever, the support and enthusiasm of our membership and the community. Tell someone you know about our events. Tell them about the work we do with students. Invite them to come to our events and to become involved. As our population ages, we need a continuous supply of younger members and volunteers to make our visions into reality. Jazz enriches our lives in myriad ways and it is our responsibility to keep the genre



moving forward for young people who will take our places in the leadership of the organization. Assist us in fulfilling this crucial goal of jazz education. Donate your time, energy, enthusiasm and financial support to jazz education. 

## **STUDENT JAZZ COMPETITION IN ELEVENTH YEAR**

by Roger Villines

Back in Fall of 2010, Jazz Pensacola leadership decided it was time to take a dive into some jazz education initiatives. One of the them that is still happening is the annual Student Jazz Competition. The first planning meetings comprised Jazz Pensacola leaders plus some local music educators and included Steve Ferry, Joe Spaniola, Cynthia and Fred Domulot, Joshua and Ron Kaye, Kathy Lyon, Mike Philly, Mike Loftis, Sandy Spivey and myself, Roger Villines. David Shelander soon joined the planning group, and Bob Byrnes, Katy Fritz and others were most helpful by donating generously to the cause.

Our first contest was in March 2011, with the live finals held at the Ashmore Fine Arts Auditorium on the campus of Pensacola State College (PSC). In the process that evolved the student applicants would submit recorded performances of specified tunes that would be prejudged in a preliminary round to chose who would go on to perform in the live finals in the 3 divisions: College Instrumental, High School Instrumental and Jazz Vocalist. The finals performances were in front of a live audience, and 3 judges would deliberate to rank the group into placings for the monetary awards ranging from \$100 to \$500.

The contests have turned out to be truly memorable, high quality events, and the student performances continue to wow the audiences. Here are a few facts about the ten contests to date: The 30 finals judges have included great jazz performers such as Longineu Parsons, David Shelander, Gary Wofsey, Bob Maksymkow, Bobby van Deusen and Steve Gilmore and educators such as Larry Panella from the University of Southern Mississippi and Raymond Smith from Troy University. A total of 90 finalists have received awards totaling over \$30,000. Awards have helped pay college tuitions, attend special jazz camps/schools and purchase instruments, computers and other music equipment. Many winners have gone on to greater heights in the jazz/music world to include prestigious jazz schools, military bands and performance successes.

In 2019, we changed the venue from the PSC Ashmore Auditorium to Phineas Phogg's in Seville Quarter. It worked very nicely, adding more of a jazz-club vibe to the experience. Last year the 2020 finals were not done in a live setting due to the COVID concerns. Instead, the finalists submitted recordings of tunes of their choice according to contest guidance, and the recordings were sent to the judges for critique and placing determination. It worked, not as good for students or listeners as live finals, but it did get the job done to keep the contest alive.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### March 15, 2021 **Student Jazz Competition**

Seville Quarter  
Phineas Phogg's  
6:30pm-9:00pm

### April 7, 2021 **Jazz Jam**

The 5Barrel  
121 S. Palafox St.  
6:30pm-9:00pm

### May 15 & 16, 2021 **Pensacola JazzFest**

Seville Square  
Schedule TBD

#### *"Student Jazz Competition" Continued...*

This year we are back to a live finals, scheduled for Monday, March 15, at Phineas Phogg's in Seville Quarter. The performances start as 6:30 p.m. Unfortunately, we received fewer applicants this year, no doubt attributed to the COVID affect. The contest will present four college and one high school instrumentalists accompanied by a professional rhythm section. The three excellent judges, Rebecca Barry, Allen Beeson and Steve Gilmore, will rank the winners (they are all winners) and monetary awards ranging from \$100 to \$500 will be presented probably before 9 p.m. Bring your masks and be prepared for a great evening of jazz highlighting young performers. 🎷

## TRIBUTE TO VIVIAN LAMONT

by Hosea London & Mike Potters



Vivian Lamont sings at a Jazz Jam at The Vineyard on January 7, 2018. Photo by Alice Crann Good.

### Hosea London

I began working with Vivian Lamont and Rudy Pendleton as Music Director for The Belmont Youth Band in 2003. It was Vivian's vision to provide lessons and instruments to students in the Pensacola area. She dedicated many hours to fundraising and volunteer activities to help secure the necessary means to keep the program operational. Vivian was also able to seek our performing opportunities for the student's to be exposed to venues outside of their local

neighborhoods.

Many students who may not have been able to afford instruments were given instruments through the Belmont program. After 13 years up Saturday music lessons, my tenure ended but I know Vivian continues to support young musicians in the area. Throughout the years, Vivian Lamont has demonstrated her commitment to music and the arts and to underserved communities. Her actions speak for themselves; Vivian is a beacon of hope and serves a model for all.

### Mike Potters

In 2004, I met popular jazz vocalist Vivian Lamont and bassist Rudy Pendleton for the first time. I had asked to meet, because I was looking for ways to interest more of the local roots musicians to participate in an open mic activity that was happening regularly at the old Belmont Arts and Cultural Center. We sat down to lunch, introduced ourselves to one another, I made my request, and within fifteen minutes, Vivian and Rudy had turned the tables on me and recruited me to teach guitar. I agreed to come teach guitar a couple of Saturdays a month, but I was there every Saturday morning after the first month, and I've kept at it for all these years ever since.

They told me about The Belmont Youth Band, the free music instruction program they had founded, for all young people in and around Pensacola, providing free instruments and weekly lessons. Public schools had cut most music out of the elementary school budget. The main reason for creating the Belmont Youth Band was for the young kids whose parents could not afford private lessons. When they would get to middle school, where there were band programs, some of the kids would already be far more advanced because they had been taking private lessons. Vivian and Rudy wanted to prepare their young students so that if they joined the school band, they would not be behind. The program Rudy and Vivian founded, and that Vivian continued championing throughout all the years grew into what now has become The Pensacola Community Music School.

After some years, for health reasons, Rudy had to step away. Vivian kept carrying on through all the years since then, building a network of teachers as the program grew. Vivian kept the program going, tirelessly raising funds, collecting donated instruments, recruiting teachers, mostly volunteers. Vivian has always promoted public performances throughout the community for her students. She helped some of her students secure college scholarships. Vivian's dedication is inspiring and her fierce passion for young people is contagious. Vivian is all about active love. 🎷

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBER

Lawrence E. Young, Jr.