

## EXPERIENCES AT UNT JAZZ

by Roger Villines

Before moving to Pensacola in 2003, Kat and I lived in Denton, Texas, home of the University of North Texas (UNT), where I completed possibly the longest master's degree program in history – six years – leading to a Master of Music Degree majoring in Jazz Studies.

In 1964, when I was in high school jazz band in Altus, Oklahoma, UNT, which was then North Texas State College, was my dream college to attend. I auditioned and visited the campus, listening with awe to a concert that featured all of their Lab Bands (that's what they called their large jazz/stage bands). Mostly for financial reasons, that dream was put on hold.

Thirty some years later, the dream reappeared. I could afford it. I had an opening in my schedule. And they approved my admissions application. There I was – an over 50-year-old, re-tired U.S. Air Force aviator (25 years) with a rather old Music Education Degree, some old band directing experience, some musical talent and experience, and a 30-year old Conn Constellation trumpet that I had resurrected and was working to sound better on. So enter I did – to a musical world full of young, highly talented musicians from all over the World. Boy, did I fit in.

And why did it take me six years to graduate? Well, for one thing, earning a masters degree in jazz studies at UNT requires proven proficiency or requisite course completions at the undergraduate level. That means you either show up for your masters program as a professional jazz performer listed on a Downbeat Jazz Poll, or you have earned a suitable undergraduate degree in jazz, or you have to take most of those UNT undergraduate courses in progressive order – you can't just skip from Improv 1 to Improv 4. The latter option was my road to the mountain top. But hey, I had some time, and it was a fun journey.

UNT Jazz Studies was like a musical meritocracy. Neither students or faculty cared about your non-musical experiences or credentials. Your previous rank in the U.S. Air Force or your leadership and management experience or your age or lots of other things made little day-to-day difference. It was all about your last jazz solo or arrangement or other school performance in a very competitive environment. Neil Slater, then head of Jazz Studies, conferred with me well in-to my program, that getting in was one thing, getting out with a degree was quite another. Dan Haerle, a renowned pianist and one of my instructors, told his class something like: one of our jobs here is to help you in making your career choice in the field of jazz. In other words, maybe it's not really the best for fit you.

One of the highlights of attending the UNT Jazz program is playing in one of the Lab Bands, or large jazz ensembles. The term Lab Band came from the historic experimental nature of often playing student arrangements/compositions and exploring new frontiers of jazz. Bands were named by the hour they met: one o'clock thru eight o'clock (the last 2 actually met earlier using a second room). The upper level bands met in the Kenton Hall Monday thru Thursday. All the bands were very good to excellent. The top one o'clock and two o'clock bands were highest level professional quality.

Placings, band and part/chair (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.), were by audition each semester. The jazz staff would deliberate our audition performances and assign placings in the various bands. The results, typed on 8.5 by 11 sheets of paper, would then be posted in the foyer of Kenton Hall for all to see. Hundreds of students would mass around the bulletin board to see what their fate would be for the upcoming semester. I remember being happy and sometimes sad at my placing. I was mostly in a solo position (4th or 5th trumpet part), which I liked, in bands ranging from 6 to 3 o'clock.

I was often disappointed to not make the one or two o'clock bands. It was considered the UNT badge of honor and ultimate sign of success. I worked and tried hard and gave it my best – and never made it. Once, I felt really good going into the auditions – this could be the year, I told myself. I looked at the placing sheets and found my name as 4th trumpet in the 4 o'clock lab band. Not only that, but one of the trumpet soloists in the one o'clock was a freshman. It turns out, he was really good. Welcome to the competitive world of jazz.

Staying in the upper two bands could also be a challenge. They were very unforgiving of any lapses in proficiency of participation. I remember a young trumpeter who made the one o'clock and in the first week announced to Neil Slater that he had a conflict with one of the scheduled concerts. A new guy was in place the next day.

Once when I was in the 6 o'clock band the lead trumpeter from the one o'clock substituted as lead with our band. The rule was, if you can't be at a rehearsal, you must arrange a substitute. No exceptions were allowed. Your honor was at stake. Anyway, he was sight reading, so you might expect an occasional small error. None were made. He played perfect. I was impressed.

I did sub in the 2 o'clock a couple of times. The first time I remember, and learned a lesson, about what it is like to play in a top level ensemble. The slightest imperfection – hold a note a little longer than the others, crack an attack,

*"Experiences" Continued...*

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not perfectly in tune in a unison section – made you stand out like a shark fin at the beach. You are motivated to bring your best skills and attention to the task at hand. When great players do this – great music happens.

The Lab Band music library was huge and diverse. Lots of original charts from famous big bands. Stan Kenton willed his library to UNT, and we played quite a few Stan Kenton charts. Always copies, never originals, which were of course quite valuable. Kenton charts were fun and exciting to play. Characterized by BIG sound. BIG climactic parts with VERY LOUD brass with VERY HIGH lead trumpet parts. And by the way, the 8 UNT jazz bands were all set at Kenton size: 5 saxes, 5 trombones (with 2 bass trombones), 5 trumpets (solos split between 4th and 5th players), plus piano, guitar, bass and drums.

I remember playing Bill Holman's Malagueña in a 3 O'clock Lab Band concert at a high school in Dallas. Very exciting!

So there you have it. I did graduate (that's what DG really means), and we moved to Pensacola, mostly because of the beach, but also attracted by the musical and jazz scene in our beautiful area.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed the 6 years experience at UNT Jazz. And, for those inter-ested, I plan to write more about some other UNT experiences. Next up: improv classes and play-ing in UNT jazz combos. 🎷

## AUTUMN LEAVES

by Carolyn Tokson

The jazz standard "Autumn Leaves" as we know it in English is a very different song from the French original. The Hungarian composer, Joseph Korma, met the lyricist Jacques Prévert in Paris. As with so many other lovely melodies, Korma borrowed some of the melody from a Roland Petit ballet pas de deux which had been influenced by Jules Massenet's "Poeme d'octobre". Together Korma and Prévert wrote "Les Feuilles Mortes" or "The Dead Leaves" in 1945 for "Les Portes de la Nuit", a 1946 film. The American version seems to point only to a short summer romance and a separation of the lovers. The original French is the story of two lovers who seem to have had a much longer relationship and who lived together. "But the life separates those who love, too quietly, without making a noise," the lyrics go. It is a song that says the singer has not forgotten those days of love in the sun and remembers them as the leaves lie dead. It is a sad song full of remembrance and regrets. There is a long 24 bars before one comes to the chorus we know here...a mere 18 bars of music. And there is a second verse in French. Often French singers speak some of the first part and slowly move into singing it. The audiences there start cheering at the first words.

While the words "autumn leaves" figure prominently in the English version written by Johnny Mercer, they are not at all at the forefront of the original French version. After 8 bars, we hear "The dead leaves gather on top of the shovel"

and it is repeated in the next phrase. We have already left autumn and are in the cold winds of winter. Mercer's version has only the chorus without the beginning portion. In the French original, there is no mention of "autumn leaves" in the chorus.

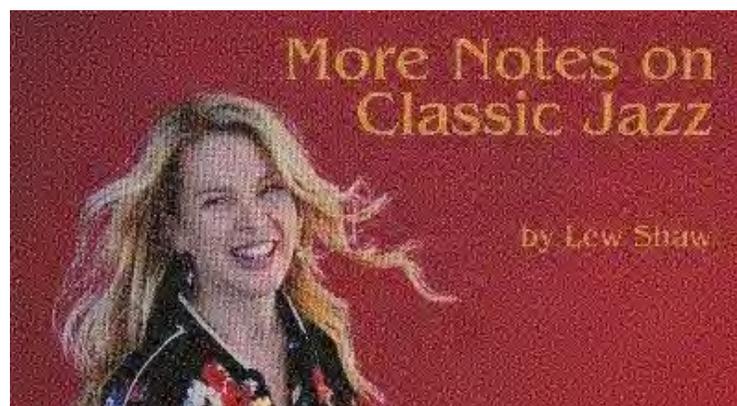
The story goes that Mercer wrote the lyrics in a hurry. Michal Goldsen, director of Capitol's music publishing department was nearing the deadline before his four-month option on the song ran out. He pressured Mercer to write some lyrics in English. Mercer wrote them in ten minutes while waiting for Goldsen to give him a ride to the train station. Mercer understood no French and had only a basic idea of the story. Yet his words made Goldsen's eyes fill with tears. The song earned Mercer the most of any music for which he had written lyrics.

Jo Stafford recorded it first. It took a while for the song to catch on in the US. Then in 1955, Roger Williams' recording hit a million sales and the song stayed on the charts for 6 months. Later recordings by Stan Getz, Bill Evans and Chet Baker helped the song become a jazz classic.



## BOOK REVIEW: JAZZ BEATS ENCORE: MORE NOTES ON CLASSIC JAZZ BY LEW SHAW

by F. Norman Vickers



The Book Cover for Jazz Beats Encore: More Notes on Classic Jazz, by Lew Shaw.

Lew Shaw is a multi-faceted writer, having a dual career as both sports and jazz writer who lives in Scottsdale, AZ. Our paths crossed when we were both active in The American Federation of Jazz Societies and both had served as president of that organization. He was an organizer and served as president of Arizona Classic Jazz Society in Phoenix.

Shaw has written for jazz publications, West Coast Rag, The American Rag, and for the past few years, The Syncopated Times. His first book, Jazz Beat, Notes of Classic Jazz was a collection of his columns from West Coast Rag and The American Rag. His current book, Jazz Beat Encore, is a collection of forty-three columns from the past few years.

Each column features a jazz musician, or group, along with a photograph and occupies about four pages. Most of

*"Jazz Beats" Continued...*

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the artists are American born but also feature clarinetist-bandleader Adrian Cunningham of Australia and pianist Paolo Alderighi, a native of Milan, Italy.

Of special interest to will be featured artists who have appeared for the Jazz Society of Pensacola events: guitarist Howard Alden, saxophonist Harry Allen, trombonist Dan Barrett, clarinetist Evan Christopher, trumpeter Duke Heitger, vocalist Rebecca Kilgore, clarinetist Tim Laughlin, The Midiri Brothers, and clarinetists Ken Peplowski and Allan Vache.

Also, as a bonus, cartoonist Bill Keane's Family Circus cartoons related to jazz were included courtesy of Jeff Keane, son of the late cartoonist.

This book, as well as Shaw's previous one, will grace the shelves of our Jazz Room at the downtown West Florida Public Library. It awaits your reading. The book, of course, is available at Amazon and other booksellers. 🎷

## **PIANIST RONNIE KOLE DIES**

by F. Norman Vickers



Ronnie Kole

New Orleans jazz pianist Ronnie Kole dies at age 89. Native Pensacolians report that Kole, a Chicago native, appeared on Lynn Toney's show on WEAR during the early years. Toney, I am told, had a kiddie's show in the afternoons where he would dress in a leopard's outfit and entertain the kids. Further, when Kole left the show, he was followed by Larry Butler and his sister.

At any rate, Kole moved to New Orleans and, when he wasn't traveling, had his own place on Bourbon Street. Later, he married a woman from Slidell, moved there into, essentially, semi-retirement. There would be occasional news reports of events in Slidell or elsewhere when Kole would play.

During the late 1980s, when WCOA was transitioning from a general to an all-talk format, the manager asked the Jazz Society if they wanted to be on an early Saturday morning show which featured no paid advertising. Bryan Newkirk was the announcer who talk about free stuff such as doggie-bathe-ins. I would come in with some jazz LPs and play them. Ronnie Kole's and has a great rendition of Amazing Grace as we'd use that for a theme-song. Once, we

arranged for a telephone interview with Mr. Kole.

That lasted only about 6 months until the station went to all-talk format. But during that time, I brought in Frank Horne, Charles J. Cetti, drummer and father of trumpeter Charles L. Cetti, Harold Andrews and others. And, as the saying goes, the rest is history.... 🎷

## **WHAT'S JAZZING AROUND TOWN?**

by Carolyn Tokson

Fall in Northwest Florida does not at all fit the classic images of autumn. Residents are still heading to the beach and complaining of the heat. Another month has passed with the concerns about the coronavirus even more in the forefront than during our spring lock-down. Constrictions to our normal patterns of life still chafe. Major festivals have been cancelled. We are still without our normal jazz Jams and Gumbos. However, Fred Domulot scheduled a live-streaming event on our Jazz Pensacola Facebook page for September 10. We are grateful to Artel Gallery for a free place to hold the virtual event. Winners of the Student Competition performed.

Saxophonist Joe Occhipinti was inducted into the Gulf Coast Ethnic and Heritage Jazz Festival Hall of Fame and the Pensacola News Journal ran a story about the modest musician who has a way of deflecting fame onto others. As pointed out by Dr. Norman Vickers who was interviewed, Joe has always been an active and important influence in the jazz society since its inception. He keeps big band music alive and is a major contributor to the jazz scene here in Northwest Florida and in Mobile where he is very involved in MOJO, the Mystic Order of the Jazz Obsessed. Joe is still at Calvert's in East Pensacola Hgts. on Tuesdays. Dr. Vickers arranged to have the PNJ article made into posters and framed. One will go to Joe and the other will hang in the Jazz Room at West Florida Public Library on Spring St. Thanks to Sparks members who donated to cover the costs.

Pianist Al Martin's book in collaboration with Dr. Sandra Winborne is selling well. Among the many recent honors Al received was a special celebration of his music by the mayor in a program at the Gordon Center. Al keeps showing up at The District on Saturday nights.

James "Burt" Kimberl is appearing at the Magnolia Grill in Ft. Walton on Thursday and Saturdays from 5 till 9:30PM. Jim Andrews is often outside at The Cactus Flower on Thursdays.

Roman Street had a live performance with a limited audience in Pensacola recently. They also streamed it live. The group won this year's Best Musician in the Nappie Awards by Lagniappe Weekly.

Our neighboring jazz society, the Gulf Jazz Society in Panama City, has also had no live performances recently. They do have tee shirts (Design by Ricky Steele) left from last year's festival and are offering those for sale. This year's festival is scheduled for October 3 and 4; they are hoping

*"Jazzing" Continued...*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### TBD Pensacola JazzFest

*"Jazzing" Continued...*

to be able to move forward by then. Check their website at [www.gulfjazzsociety.org](http://www.gulfjazzsociety.org).

Gino Rosaria's single "Sunday 3PM" featuring saxophonist Elan Trotman hit the airwaves on Monday, August 31. It is playing on all jazz stations and also on XM satellite radio. It's from Gino's album "Still Waters Run Deep" available on Amazon.

Jazz flautist, Chip Shelton, who has often played here suffered considerable damage to his home and music studio in NY during the August storms when a tree fell into the house. However, the good news is that his CD "Plan Be Dream Music" was rising in air-play on radio stations for 7 weeks straight. We can expect a new CD "Mentors" in November. Chip's brother Ron Shelton is a long term member of the society and volunteers with us here locally. You can connect to Chip's blog at <https://chipshelton.bandcamp.com> and to one of his latest projects at <http://chipshelton.bandcamp.com/track/plan-be-by-the-flute-party-band>.

Especially since the recent spike in the virus, Jazz Pensacola members are listening to music at home or on the road. When they are out and about in the car, Knox and Holly Parker are listening to the blues on Sirius channel 74. Michael McCartan says he enjoys Melody Gardot on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_XDL1jvHFsc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XDL1jvHFsc). When I checked the link, I was thrilled with her music, especially the link above which has the influence of North African sounds.

Here's a list of music with links that you might enjoy. They were sent to me by pianist and vocalist Paul Stewart. Credit for the clever comments attached all goes to him.

"You asked for tunes to hear during Covid 'Carceration . . . well, I could likely wear out my welcome with links but here's a few--starting with most "accessible"? then, segueing through a singer vocalizing on "musicians' music"; then going to the avant-garde . . . the latter not bed-time music!

- Big Band Boppin': Thad Jones, Mel Lewis on catchy dancing tune entitled Ahunk, Ahunk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKQIZl6N11g>

- Singer Superlative: Roberta Gambarine, on an old standard, On the Sunny Side of the Street, in which she scats the tune's actual solos of legendary sax player, Sonny Stitt; then, Dizzy Gillespie's trumpet solo on same song. Please wear your seat belt as she does

the high register trumpet improves Diz pulled off . . . <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4Hv-CIWgQE>

- Penultimate Piano: Don Pullen, reflecting not only Gershwin but history of jazz in Evidence of Things Unseen--his fist clusters are rarely heard--most non-commercial piano players wish they could do a fraction of Pullen's artistry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocQ00yd7NL8>

Thanks to Paul for his recommendations.

Our best wishes to Lynn Parker who is recovering from his recent health challenges. I called Barbara Oliver just to check on her and Lew and said she and Sue Parker had just been discussing how they missed our jazz events. Vocalist Vivian Lamont is recuperating at her daughter, Laroyce's, home. Vocalist and guitarist Art Carnrick and his wife, Maureen, were both ill with COVID-19. Art just experienced the first of his "well" days recently and his wife seems on the road to recovery also. Sincere condolences go to Dick Pace on the death of his wife, Jane. The Paces have been members of Jazz Pensacola since 1991.

Hoping you all exercise due caution and stay well in this difficult time. 🙏

### DONATIONS ARE WELCOME

The challenges of COVID-19 are indeed real to a 501(c)(3) organization such as Jazz Pensacola. Many of the major non-profits are having to scale back events and close their doors as the virus rages. Naturally, we as a small jazz society are in the same situation as the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic Symphony, only we do not have the large endowment funds that they possess. If you have the means, think of making a donation to assist us as we navigate this uncertain time. Our board is being as thrifty as possible but there is still the office rent, the administrator's salary, the electric bill, the insurance. Remember, all donations are tax-deductible. You may send a check to Jazz Pensacola, 3 West Garden St. Suite 418, Pensacola, FL 32502 or you may call the office at 433-8382 and make a donation by phone. We appreciate your generosity. 🙏

From a Proust Questionnaire with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar from Vanity Fair of September 2020

Question: "What is your favorite journey?"

Answer: "The question suggests a spiritual journey or even an exotic trip, but I get both of those when I go to a jazz performance. It not only delights my senses but it connects me to my ethnic culture in a deeply satisfying way."