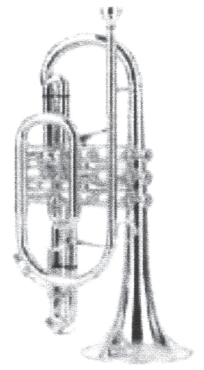


# JAZZ SOUNDINGS

THE PUGET SOUND TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY



April 2020

Volume 45, Number 4

## **PSTJS BOARD VOTES TO CANCEL APRIL 19TH CONCERT**

By an email vote concluded March 14, the Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society Board of Directors voted overwhelmingly to cancel the Ain't No Heaven Seven Jazz Band concert scheduled for April 19 in order to protect our musicians, members, guests, and Elks staff from COVID-19 and do our part in the effort to contain the virus.

When discussions about the cancellation began only a few days earlier, the vote's outcome was by no means certain. Even after it was taken, board members assumed the board would have to present a careful explanation to the membership to justify the cancellation of a concert so far into the future. However, events have changed so fast that a detailed explanation now seems moot. The very next day, Governor Inslee issued an order closing all bars and restaurants and banning public gatherings of 50 or more people. When these edicts were added to the orders already in place closing schools and libraries, it became clear that the board's action was the only one it could take under the circumstances.

Now that we have extended our field of vision to include concerts scheduled a full month in advance of our newsletter, we will continue to stay on top of events and do our best to make decisions about future concerts ahead of time. As it stands now, the decision about the Black Swan Jazz Band concert on May 17 is up in the air. We ask that you consult the May issue of the Soundings for an update.

## **PSTJS HISTORY PROVES ITS RESILIENCE**

by John Ochs

With the cancellations of our March and April concerts due to COVID-19, it may be of some solace to draw on experiences gained from other disruptions our society has endured during its 45-year history.

There were no cancellations during our society's first 20 years (1975 - 1994), but one schedule change was a particular let-down to our membership. In those days, Bay-Area jazz buff Charles Huggins, then president and CEO of See's Candies, was in the habit of hiring Turk Murphy's Jazz Band to perform at the openings of See's new retail stores. Sometime in the mid-1980s, the Murphy band was engaged to play an opening in the Seattle area. Always on the lookout to hire big-ticket out-of-town bands set to visit the area, PSTJS music director Tom Rippey hired the band for a Sunday concert. Unhap-

pily, Murphy opted out at the last minute, forcing Tom to fill the date on short notice with a local band.

Our first outright cancellation came in February 1995 when a performance featuring the Evergreen Classic Jazz Band was cancelled due to accumulation of ice and snow. The schedule for the year was already full, but an accommodation was made by adding an extra set of music to the April meeting and engaging the Evergreen to share the bill with CanUs. In those years, the society had a full treasury and almost 1,000 members, so we could afford to hire two bands for one concert.

Joan Reynolds' Red Rose Ragtime Band from Chicago was set to play a concert on Sept. 16, 2001. Unfortunately, the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center curtailed airline flights through-

out the country, so she canceled our job and accepted a gig closer to home in Ohio instead. Luckily, our concert was salvaged when the Ain't No Heaven Seven stepped into the breach that day.

Another near-miss occurred in January five or six years ago (the exact year is not documented in our Jazz Soundings) when a sudden snowstorm forced closure of a number of I-5 off-ramps south of Seattle, thus delaying the arrival of Bert and Rose Marie Barr for the Uptown Lowdown Jazz Band's first set. As it happened, most of the other musicians in the band lived in other parts of the region and the concert began on time, albeit without its bandleader and pianist.

Most of us recall the cancellation of the Jen Hodge All-Stars' concert in February of

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# Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Elks Lodge, Ballard, 6411 Seaview Ave N.W., Seattle

April 19	Cancelled
May 17	Black Swan Classic Jazz Band
June 21	Ain't No Heaven Seven

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## JAZZ SOUNDINGS

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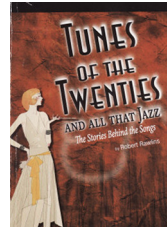
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Deadline is the 10th of the month for the next month's issue

# WHAT, NO MEETING? How About A Good Book Instead?

by George Swinford



With next month's concert cancelled, as well as sports on TV, I can imagine many of us faced with a really quiet Sunday afternoon. Let me recommend a good book on "our kind of music."

"Tunes of the Twenties and All That Jazz" was written by Robert Rawlins as a companion to "The Real Dixieland Book" which contains the sheet music to 250 traditional jazz classics.

"Tunes Of The Twenties" tells their story. Rawlins is a professor of music theory and a performing musician. I found "Tunes of the Twenties" advertised in The Syncopated Times a few years ago and I continue to be delighted with it. The book is a compendium of information about almost 250 tunes of the jazz era. Some of them actually come from before the '20s, some later. Quoting the author, "Tunes of the Twenties" is true, but not to be taken literally. It refers to a style, an attitude, and a mindset, not necessarily a decade."

The tunes appear in alphabetical order, from "Ace In the Hole" all the way to "You're the Cream In My Coffee". In every case we learn who wrote the music and lyrics and the copyright date. Then the author talks about the songs. He reveals just what he found interesting about each tune. He has tried to make each story "unique, funny, witty, if possible, and sometimes irreverent". And believe me, he has succeeded! The many illustrations include some vintage photographs, but most are full color pictures of the original sheet music covers, just as they would have appeared on the music rack of grandma's old upright.

I can hardly say enough good things about this book. You can open it anywhere and find fascinating, entertaining information about tunes, authors, publishers, and performers. As Rawlins says in his preface, "If it wasn't interesting, I left it out." He often mentions outstanding recordings of the subject tune, many by current-day artists, such as Bria Skonberg or Vince Giordano who wrote the book's foreword.

This paperback book is in 9x6 format, printed on high-quality slick paper and meant to last. Rookwood House Publishing currently offers it on their website at \$22.50 and it's well worth every nickel. Order it and read it! You won't be sorry!

**J** THE PUGET SOUND TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY  
**JAZZ SOUNDINGS** 

## On Your Dial.....

**Sunday**

3-6 pm Ken Wiley's Art of Jazz on KNKX - 88.5FM

## NEW ORLEANS IN SEATTLE

### Wittwer and Darensbourg Bring the Old-Time Jazz to the Pacific Northwest; Dixieland in the Tall Timber

*(Traditional jazz has long been a vibrant if fringe element in Seattle's music scene, but just when, where, and with whom did it begin? This article, from a 1944 Jazz Record magazine, provides an answer. Not long after its publication, local physician and jazz fan Dr. Frederick (Doc) Exner recorded the Wittwer-Darensbourg-Purvis trio described in the article and issued their recordings on his Exner label. Inspired by those records and other Exner records featuring Joe Darensbourg with Kid Ory's band, a group of Seattle youngsters formed the Rainy City Jazz Band, which in turn helped pass the baton to the next generation of local musicians. Although Darensbourg left in 1946, Johnny Wittwer remained in Seattle where his legacy lives on in the person of his most famous student, Ray Skjelbred.)*

by Wallace Umphrey

Reprinted from The Jazz Record, December 1944

"It was called the 'Midnight Special' down in New Orleans," Joe says. "They used to play it around midnight – for maybe forty minutes at a stretch."

That's Joe Darensbourg, one of the finest clarinetists ever to come out of New Orleans. He's talking about the tune called "Careless Love Blues."

Johnny says: "So let's play it next." And that's Johnny Wittwer, the best jazz pianist to ever come out of Seattle – or for that matter one of the best to come out of anywhere.

New Orleans and Chicago and New York and San Francisco have their jazz but Seattle has it, too. Geographically and in the jazz sense it's a long way from New Orleans,

Louisiana, to Seattle, Washington, but maybe geography doesn't have much to do with jazz.

Because here these boys are, playing six nights a week at the China Pheasant in Johnny Wittwer's band. And they really play it. Things like "At a Georgia Camp Meeting" and "When Erastus Plays His Old Kazoo." Which gives you a pretty good idea of the stuff the boys like.

Seattle isn't what you could call a jazz town by any stretch of the imagination. Why, you can just about count the true jazz lovers here without taking off your shoes. But if anything can arouse the town from its jazz illiteracy, these boys can do it.

#### Meet the band:

Evan Humphrey, trumpet; Neal Ely, tenor; Joe Darensbourg, clarinet and vocal; Johnny Wittwer, piano and trombone; Tommy Kelly, bass; and Keith Purvis, drums.

Outside of Joe and Johnny the boys haven't played around much. Evan has been on the road with the Katherine Dunham dancers in the fine little Dixieland band featured on the stage, Neal has played

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Johnny Wittwer, 1956



Left to right: Keith Purvis, Joe Darensbourg, and Johnny Wittwer.



*New Orleans - continued from page 3*

in a Coast Guard band, and the others have gigged around a little but mostly they've just played in Johnny's band.

Johnny's piano is fine. It's wonderful. Maybe some day he'll be great. But it won't be because his piano is any different than it is now, only because it'll be known. He's got a tremendous beat, the right breaks, and there's nothing precious about his right hand; a combination that's been missing too often since Jelly Roll.

His life is jazz. When he isn't playing he's listening to records, trying to get it, trying to find out for himself what it all really means, what it's about; but afterwards playing it his own way, putting himself into it. Which is the way it should be. And that's why jazz won't ever die; because there will always be the few who have the love of jazz and the understanding and ability and the desire to play it the way it should be played. With the heart and not just the head.

Johnny knows music. There were five years of it at the University of Washington. Maybe that's why he likes to listen to classical music once in a while.

"But only listen," he says. "Not play it. I don't play it because it gets me confused. I find I start playing a little like Tatum or Basie."

After leaving school he gigged a bit locally, then headed for greener fields in California and odd jobs with Wingy Manone. That was the spring of '43. Next came a stretch with Jackson Teagarden's big band in the summer and fall of the same year. A little jamming with the boys now and then; with Sidney Arodin at the Kit-Kat Club in New Orleans.

But big band stuff wasn't what he wanted. He wanted the kind of jazz that only a small band can play – real jazz. So bravely back to Seattle to form his own band.

He did it. Even in a town like Seattle he did it. Even in a town that thought jump stuff was the pinnacle of jazz. Because Johnny's got imagination. When he couldn't find a guy who could play trombone the way he wanted—the way Kid Ory used to and still does in a Los Angeles joint—he started playing the trombone parts himself. Well, he's no Kid Ory yet. His trombone is rough; boy, but it's rough! But listen to these big bass figures. And coming along fine on the melody parts, too.

Joe Darensbourg... Well, Joe's played a clarinet ever since he's been big enough to hold one. You could say that Joe took up the clarinet because he needed an outlet for his self-expression, because his soul cried for music. You could say all this and it might sound poetic, but it isn't the way it happened. Let's have Joe tell it.



*Joe Darensbourg, circa 1946*

"It's like this," he says. "More than anything else, I guess, when I was a kid I wanted to go away with the circus. I used to lie awake and dream about it nights. But my old man told me: 'Joe, you can't do that. You've got to be able to do something.' Well, I figured he was right. I'd been leading the second line for a long time at parades and things, and mostly I'd watched Picou. I liked what he did and the way he did it. So I just figured I'd learn to play the clarinet, too."

So he did. His teacher was Manuel Roque, and in 1924 Joe was playing in the Al G. Barnes Circus band the way he'd always dreamed.

Before that, though, a couple of years before, Joe came out to the West Coast where he played with Mutt Carey and Kid Ory and the rest.

"It was Mutt's band," Joe says. "It was a good band. Well, we used to go over to Mutt's place to rehearse. He wouldn't ever let us rehearse any place else. Only before we'd ever get started, out would come Mutt's poker deck. Before we left Mutt would have all

our money. We never did rehearse much, but nobody seemed to care. Only I wonder now why Mutt always used his own cards and why he always won."

### Remember that, Mutt?

Joe played with Mutt and then with the circus, but by 1925 he was home again playing with Buddy Petit in Baton Rouge. Joe was born in Baton Rouge. Next came a job with Charlie Creath at the Plantation in St. Louis. This was the only time Joe's ever been recorded: He remembers "Dinah" and "Spanish Shawl," and a couple of others. For a week he played with Jelly Roll Morton in Cairo, Illinois. George Mitchell and Pop Humphrey and Tubby Hall were in that band. There were trips on the Strekfus boats with Fate Marable's band. Joe's history is the history of jazz.

His clarinet can't be topped today. Maybe he plays a little like Noone used to play. It's pretty dangerous saying somebody plays like somebody else. Most of all Joe plays his own way.

So there you are. Jazz is where you find it. Joe's from New Orleans, Johnny and the rest are from Seattle. Yet they play wonderfully together.

Sometimes it's the full band. All Johnny asks is that they play the tune; not stale riffs heard a hundred times before. And it's great, watching them and listening. Watching Johnny play piano with one hand and fumble around behind his back for his trombone when it's "Everybody now!"

And some times it's just the trio. Joe and Johnny and Keith, playing alone. Things like "Tiger Rag" and "Come Back Sweet Papa" and "Wolverine Blues." It's Joe's inspired clarinet, and Johnny's heavy beat and fine left hand, and Keith's solid restrained drums. It's Joe's vocal, too. And so what's happened to this jazz form, anyway? Why isn't it still popular? It makes you wonder, listening to the three of them, why the trio is heard so seldom now, and why these boys can't be put on wax.

Unconsciously you paraphrase Wingy. Man, they can truly play it.





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