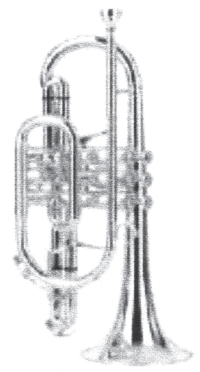


JAZZ SOUNDINGS

THE PUGET SOUND TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY



January 2020

Volume 45, Number 1

IT'S SKJELBRED'S YETI CHASERS ELEVENTH APPEARANCE, IN OUR FIRST CONCERT OF 2020!

by George Swinford



Dave Brown, Dave Holo, Steve Wright, Ray Skjelbred, Mike Daugherty

Since 2009 pianist Ray Skjelbred has led bands at our pre-Christmas sessions. Breaking with that tradition, on January 19th Ray's sextet will instead be the first band to entertain us in the new decade. Initially known as the First Thursday Band, now the Yeti Chasers, Ray's groups have featured some of the best traditional jazzmen in the area. This year will be no exception.

Dave Holo will be playing cornet. Jacob Zimmerman and Steve Wright will play reeds. Dave Brown will travel from Spokane to reunite with the Yeti Chasers on bass. As always, Mike

each of Ray's December PSTJS appearances. Dave Holo came aboard for the December 2013 concert and has played each one since. Jacob Zimmerman joined up in 2017.

After ten years, Ray's groups are pretty much a known quantity. In these newsletters my predecessor (the late Rod Belcher) and I have slung handfuls of adjectives in their praise. It's hard to find something new to say about them. Simply put, these fine musicians are well known to each other, and to us. They are thoroughly familiar with each other's playing style and

Daugherty will provide appropriate percussion. Steve, Mike and Dave Brown made up Ray's original foursome, playing on the first Thursday of the month at the New Orleans Creole Restaurant, in Pioneer Square. Those three have been on the stand for

with Ray's leadership. Ray himself plays superb Chicago-style piano. He chooses a variety of tunes for the band, some familiar, some obscure, some just neglected. The Yeti Chasers treat each one with respect. For the past ten years our listeners and dancers alike have approved. Join us at the Ballard Elks on January 19th to enjoy Skjelbred's Yeti Chasers once again!

WHERE:

Ballard Elks Lodge
6411 Seaview Ave. NW, Seattle

WHEN:

1 pm - 4:30 pm - January 19

ADMISSION: Pay only at door.

\$12 PSTJS members

\$15 non-members.

Free admission for those under 21 who accompany a person paying admission.

FURTHER INFO:

Carol Rippey 425-776-5072.

Or - website: www.pstjs.org. Plenty of free parking; great view & dance floor, snacks, coffee, and other beverages available.

Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society

19031 Ocean Avenue
Edmonds, WA 98020-2344
425-776-5072 www.pstjs.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Jan. 19	Ray Skjelbred's Yeti Chasers
Feb. 16	Jonathan Doyle Jazz Band
March 15	Grand Dominion Jazz Band
April 19	Ain't No Heaven Seven
May 17	TBA
June 21	TBA

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

Gigs for Local Bands

BARRELHOUSE GANG TRIO

Tuesdays 7:30-10:30 Oliver's Twist, 6822 Greenwood Ave. N.
Seattle, WA 98103

BELLINGHAM TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY

1st Saturday, 2-5pm VFW Hall 625 N. State St.
Bellingham, WA

Jan. 4	Maple Leaf Jazz Band
Feb. 1	Josh Roberts and Friends
March 7	Yeti Chasers
April 4	Bellingham Dixieland All Stars
May 9	Market Street Jazz Band
June 6	Evergreen Classic Jazz Band

PEARL DJANGO

Jan 7 & 8 7:30pm Jazz Alley 2033 Sixth Ave., Seattle, WA
(206-441-9729).

RAY SKJELBRED'S YETI CHASERS

Jan 19 1:30-4:30 pm Elks Lodge, Ballard, 6411
Seaview Ave N.W., Seattle

WELCOME NEW

MEMBERS:

KEVIN JOHNSTON

DAVID LOOMIS

TERRY WALLS, SR.

TERRY WALLS, JR.

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

IN LIFE AND IN MUSIC STEVE WRIGHT IS VERSATILITY PERSONIFIED

by John Ochs

This month's bio features Steve Wright who plays cornet and reeds with Ray Skjeldred's Yeti Chasers. The present article is timely because this year marks 25 years since he moved from Boston to Seattle.

Steve Wright was born in Kansas City in 1952. He and his younger brother Rob started taking piano lessons from a neighbor at the same time when Steve was 9 or 10 years of age. Wright's mother had played C-Melody saxophone in high school, so one Christmas morning he found a tenor sax under the tree. He played the tenor and and baritone sax in the school band all through junior high. He also took more advanced piano lessons from highly regarded Steve Miller, a Juilliard graduate who performed with the Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra and led the city's most popular dance orchestra.

Miller would alternate Steve's lessons at each session. "One week, we'd work on classical pieces, and the next week we would concentrate on the chords, cadences, and harmonizations used in popular music. Years later, I learned his reasoning from my mother. Our family did not have a lot of money, and Miller thought I might be able to help pay my way through college playing cocktail piano on the side."

As it turned out, Steve never played piano for pay either in school or afterward, but Miller's lessons nonetheless proved important to his as yet uncharted future as a jazzman. "I developed my own version of a 'classical-jazz' piano style and achieved a measure of popularity by playing the latest pop tunes for friends who gathered around the piano and sang along. Many years later, when I picked up my old tenor sax again, I was pleased to learn that my piano studies had taught me to play by ear."

Wright left popular music behind during college: "I majored in math and physics at MIT from 1969 to 1973. I didn't play sax, but I continued to play classical piano in the music school's rehearsal rooms for my own enjoyment. For a while, I considered switching my major to music. I could play fairly complicated things like Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto all the way through at the proper tempo with just a few mistakes, but I dropped the idea after attempting the Third Concerto. It was like listening to Louis Armstrong's record of Swing That Music when he hits a series of high Cs and Ds on the out-choruses of his solo and then ascends even higher to a concert E-flat on his last note. In each case, I realized I could never play like that no matter how hard I tried."

After MIT, Wright went on to study and teach at Boston University, earning a PhD in Physics. In 1979, he took a job as a scientific computer programmer working on software for the turbomachinery industry. In 1984, he went to work on technical workstation graphics for Apollo Computer, where he stayed until 1995 when he left Boston to accept a similar position at Microsoft in Seattle. Steve didn't play traditional jazz until his early 30s. "A longtime friend, Erich Veyhl, was a fan of the Black Eagle Jazz Band. He invited me to attend an adult-education class in traditional jazz at Concord, MA. Erich had a trumpet, and



*Photo taken at Ray Skjeldred's 75th birthday party!
Bottom left corner - Steve Wright, Ray's dog Pika
Lady in back - Mary Jane Erickson,
Plaid shirt - Mike Daugherty,
Norwegian sweater - Ray Skjeldred, Right side - Dave Brown*

I played tenor sax. We practiced by playing along with the Black Eagle recordings. We also attended monthly jazz sessions around Boston called Sam's Jams. About a year into them, I brought a clarinet to one of the jams, but I didn't get to play much because there were seven other clarinetists in attendance. Another time, I brought a newly purchased York cornet, and five lead horns showed up. Eventually, I added an alto and a soprano sax to my collection."

Before long, his jam-session mentors were asking him to play gigs. "By 1984, I was getting quite a bit of paid work. A turning point came when I met cornetist Jeff Hughes at a jam session on Cardigan

Mountain in New Hampshire. I was blown away by his complete mastery of his instrument. His horn had a lyrical quality different from anything I had ever heard. His playing was fluid and there was a sweetness to his tone that I found quite compelling. He's still my favorite cornet player. He can hit one note and bring a tear to my eye."

continued on page 4

Steve Wright - continued from page 3

As it happened, Hughes was looking to form a band with a front line featuring two reeds and a cornet patterned after the Original Wolverines Orchestra records and the Commodore Records recording sessions featuring Pee Wee Russell, Bud Freeman, and/or Ernie Cacaes. He already had recruited Gary Rodberg as a reed player so, after discovering Wright, he contacted drummer Ray Smith, then a popular jazz radio host and bandleader of Ray Smith's Decades of Jazz. After inviting the group to sit in on a few of his regular gigs at the Sticky Wicket and the Groton Inn, Smith was sold on Jeff's idea.

By late 1985, the Decades of Jazz offshoot had become the Paramount Jazz Band of Boston. Along with Hughes, Rodberg, and Wright, its members included Robin Verdier, piano; Jimmy Mazzy, banjo; Chuck Stewart, tuba; and Smith, drums. Steve remembers the band with obvious affection: "It was a constant learning experience. Being surrounded by guys as brilliant as Jeff and Gary was a huge step up for me. When you play with musicians better than you, you play better and get better yourself."

Inspired in part by Smith's knowledge of early jazz, the Paramount was one the first festival bands to devote a major portion of its repertoire to forgotten 1920s and '30s pop tunes, which it spruced up with new, inventive charts and voicings, and performed with precision and verve. This fresh approach resonated with audiences and contributed to a renewed interest in the 'hot dance' music of the era. Much of the band's appeal can be attributed to the multi-instrumental talents of Wright and Rodberg, whose versatility made it sound more sonorous than other bands with the same number of musicians.

At first, the Paramount played mostly local jobs in Boston and at festivals and parties in the East. After a few years, however, its popularity spread, and the band soon came to be a regular addition to festivals on the West Coast as well, even playing at our PSTJS concerts when it was in the area playing at the San Juan Island and West Seattle Jazz festivals in 1990 and

1993. At the time, our society's meetings were taking place at the old Mountaineers Club near Elliot Avenue.

Both Wright and Gary Rodberg left Boston at the start of 1995, but rather than breaking up the group entirely, band members voted to carry on as a reunion band to perform at jazz festivals and special events. This arrangement continued until their mentor Ray Smith died in 2010 at age 87.

Steve took a while to settle in after moving to Seattle, but in September 1995 he agreed to play a gig with Tom Jacobus' Evergreen Classic Jazz Band. "With all the changes going on in my life I wasn't sure about playing music, but I had fun winging stuff with the Evergreen, so I stayed on." After Craig Flory and Dave Holo left, the Evergreen went on ice for seven or eight years. Steve kept busy filling in as needed on reeds and cornet with the Uptown Lowdown, Stumptown, and Hume Street bands.

Wright was playing clarinet with Candace and Dave Brown's Combo deLuxe when he met trumpet player Bob Jackson in 2008. At the time, Jackson was seeking a reed player for his First Thursday Band which was playing once a month at Gaye Anderson's New Orleans Creole Restaurant in Pioneer Square. "The First Thursday job was my first chance to work a steady job with Ray Skjellbred. When I started, Buddy Catlett was playing bass and the band was without a full-time drummer. Later, bassist Dave Brown and drummer Mike Daugherty joined Jackson, Ray and myself as regular band members."

Jackson retired from music in 2009, but the First Thursday Band has continued to operate as a quartet under Skjellbred's leadership ever since. The band lost its monthly Thursday gig in 2012 when the New Orleans closed following owner Gaye Anderson's death, so Ray changed the band's name to the Yeti Chasers. For a while, the quartet held down a weekend date at the Royal Room in Columbia City, but the job didn't last. Since then, Skjel-

bred has managed to keep the band afloat with performances at a variety of jazz-club, swing-dance, shopping-center, and private performances around the region.

In addition to working with the Yeti Chasers and the re-constituted Evergreen band, Wright is first call to fill in on cornet and reeds for many of the traditional jazz bands in the area. Lately, he has kept busy accompanying Rose Barr in her various Uptown Swing and Jazz combinations.

Steve and his wife Annie live in Bothell; three of their five children live with them, and the other two live nearby in Lynwood and Alderwood. This January marks his 25th anniversary with Microsoft. Presently, he is a Senior Program Manager on the Windows Interaction and Experiences Platform team.

When he isn't working, playing music, or tending to family, Steve is busy putting the finishing touches on a definitive English translation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, which, at 2,783 pages as originally published, is one of the longest novels ever written. "The book is a labor of love, not unlike music, even though it's a completely different enterprise. I plan to list it on Amazon next spring. I've learned French and taught myself French history to understand what Hugo was thinking. For instance, I have an interest in puns and I found he was the great punster, something most other translations have missed." Wright's edition is full of footnotes and illustrations, including a copy of the original map of the Paris sewer system through which Jean Valjean escapes with the body of Marius Pontmercy on his shoulders. For those interested, Steve intends to keep followers posted about the book's publication on Facebook.

As for music, Steve plans to keep on making it for as long as he can feel good about what he does. "It's been a wonderful ride. Music has been responsible for a lot of great experiences over the years. It has been a great opportunity for self-expression and meeting all kinds of people with whom I have worked and learned from. That's what motivates me – personal expression and learning from others."

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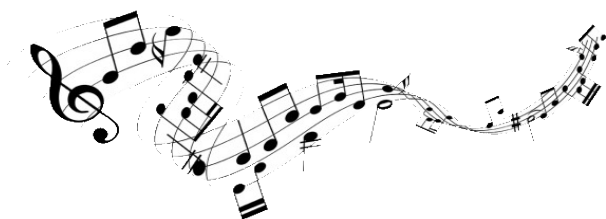
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The Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization dedicated to the performance and preservation of traditional jazz. Your membership and contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you.

~ PREZ SEZ ~

In one of the first Board meetings of 2019, I stated that when the year ended, we should look back and say, "We DID it!" Well, we hosted a fantastic Bert Barr Bash, brought in some new talented musicians, attended a community expo to promote our Society, suffered the loss of EDMUNDE LEWIN, a long time Board member (and keeper of the coffee) and even endured cancelling a Sunday performance because of a snow fall.

As we look forward to 2020, our main concern is how to increase our membership. In attending just about every genre of music that is available, I find that almost everyone is unaware that our Society even exists and the Board has been testing various means of making us more visible. It's not going to be easy, but I'm asking all of you to help us grow by ONE~~~that's YOUR ONE, MY ONE! Let's dream big and then live to fill that dream!



Red X on your Jazz Soundings mailing address label with **your name** on it - means it's time to renew your membership.

TWO red XX means **last chance to Renew Now!**



We're looking for new
Members

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