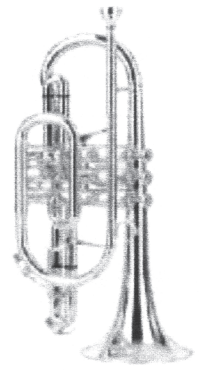


# JAZZ SOUNDINGS

THE PUGET SOUND TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY



May 2020

Volume 45, Number 5

## COVID-19 - A MUSICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

### GIG WORKER

by Ray Skjelbred



*Ray Skjelbred*

*Looking ahead to better times.*

We are currently in a very dangerous time in the history of the whole world. The virus is powerful and mysterious and we have to do everything we can to survive. And with all the news, we have become more familiar with new words and phrases like “flattening the curve” and “social distancing.” However, the one

that speaks to me as a musician is “gig worker.” Musicians know their jobs as “gigs” and they are certainly gig workers, and so are others who live and work from job to job. You might be a musician or a clown for hire at birthday parties. You don’t work paycheck to paycheck, as some people do, you live gig to gig. You might earn \$1,000 one week and \$75 the next. That is the way it goes. And I don’t mean musicians who are rock stars or household names, just the jazz, dance and swing musicians for whom life is always a struggle. Now people with no work are looking for unemployment money How does a gig worker define an employer? There might be 100 people you worked for. No matter what, it is a struggle. And a mystery.

It was about a month ago when I first heard of a musician friend who had been in a setting where the virus had appeared. He self-quarantined immediately and never became infected, but he was in contact with other musicians who were then in contact with other musicians and all of a sudden the potential for trouble was there, even if no

one in that scene got infected. I pulled out of two jobs because I was uncomfortable about the circumstances. And I admit I felt bad because cancellations had not happened yet. But almost as soon as my work was cancelled, the other cancellations started pouring in. So now all musicians are out of work. What do people do? I admit I don’t know about Zoom and streaming, but some people are performing music that way and asking for donations. If you are curious and want to hear live music, you can explore streaming live jazz.

I am staying alert with studying songs that I might have let slip by, relearning structures and chords, and I read many hours a day. My dog enjoys long walks. I check the news and look at old films. I keep bouncing back and forth from one activity to another. I try to have a variety of things I like to do and hope for the best. I wish we had a national plan for recovery. That would make a difference, but I believe the majority of people are trying to do the right thing. It is going to be here for an undefined amount of time. No jazz, no baseball, no restaurants. But I hope thoughtful behavior, listening to science and a cooperative spirit become a national habit. There is no reason to hold back on anything helpful now.

# Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society

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NOTE: BECAUSE OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS REGARDING THE CURRENT VIRUS OUTBREAK, THE MAY AND JUNE PSTJS EVENTS HAVE BEEN CANCELLED.

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

## ~ PREZ SEZ ~

Looking beyond the horizon, We stand prepared to face the coming changes. Little did we know that our 2019-2020 season would engulf us, especially when we found ourselves caught in a shut down dilemma that was controlled by our Governor. Since there is little we can do, the best is to think ahead when that grip will be released and we can once again look forward to those marvelous Sundays when we hear that wonderful music and see our Society friends. It's not just our organization, but the musicians who are being hurt also, by having to put their instruments in a carrying case and wait it out! Remember, accordingly they can't even rehearse with their friends because of the social distancing rule. When that ban is lifted, we have to look at the joy of coming back together and finding the peace in gathering~~~maybe we should just have a 'gathering Sunday', so we can get back in the habit of being the people we once were. Meantime, we just have to see what the other organizations will be doing to keep themselves afloat and holding meetings with the public and the men with the horns! Gee, I hope they don't cancel the boat trip from Seattle to Alaska. I was looking forward to having TWO bands with us, all the way through the Inside Passage and back!

Jim Blokzyl, Pres

Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society

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**JAZZ SOUNDINGS** 

## On Your Dial.....

**Sunday**

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

## THE RUSTAD BROTHERS

### TACOMA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PSTJS

by John Ochs

*(This piece was intended to appear in conjunction with the Ain't No Heaven Jazz Band's appearance this month. COVID-19 upset this plan, but we plan to reschedule the band as soon as feasible.)*



*Ron Rustad: Photo by Dan Hill*

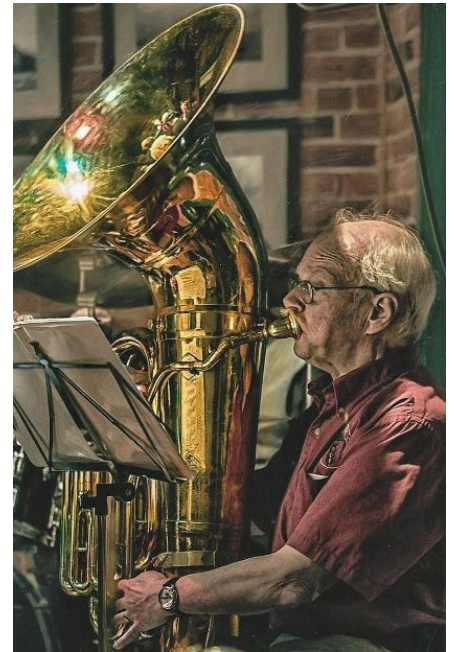
Although the brothers Rustad – Allan and Ron – are both members of the Ain't No Heaven Seven Jazz Band, they have not always performed together. True enough, they share the same family heritage, and their musical journeys have occasionally intersected, but, for the most part, each has followed his own path. Allan has played tuba with traditional-jazz bands from time to time, but his main passion for the past 40 years has been as founder and leader of the Cornucopia Concert Band, a band which, while steeped in the music of early Americana, does not fall neatly within the bounds of traditional jazz.

Ron, on the other hand, has pretty much remained a traditional-jazz vocalist since he began to focus on singing with the Rainier Jazz Band in 1980. Musicians who pull their weight solely as singers in the idiom are a rare commodity. Often, in concert with the music's communal nature, band members share the vocals rather than rely on one member to carry the load. In bands that feature a non-instrumentalist, the singer is usually a woman whose performances call to mind particular vocalists of past generations.

Ron is an exception to these conventions both because he is a male singer and because he has developed a unique sound and delivery unlike anyone else. Endowed with a rich baritone voice and a broad dynamic range capable of both volume and emotional depth, he is equally at ease crooning a tender love song or belting out a raucous barroom ballad. Sadness, pathos, humor, and irony laced with sly asides and subtle innuendo are all artfully presented during a typical Rustad concert appearance.

Music for the Rustads goes back to their paternal grandfather, Pete, born in 1879, who played violin in a village band in Mannville, Alberta, Canada where the family homesteaded in 1907. Both Allan and Ron were impressed as youngsters with his playing. "I heard my grandfather play old-time stuff on the fiddle," Allan recalls. "His favorites were 'Dill Pickles Rag' and a concert waltz called 'Wedding of the Winds' with double-stop chord embellishments. He also played mandolin banjo, a four-stringed instrument with a banjo body, tuned like a violin."

Allan and Ron's father, Rusty, was born in 1909 while his parents were still living in Alberta. In 1924, Pete sold the farm and moved the family to Tacoma where Rusty would wed Mimi Hjalseth in 1937. Rusty played trumpet in high school, but Al and Ron remember their mother as the real musician in



*Allan Rustad: Photo credit: Dan Hill*

the family. The piano her parents gave her as a high-school graduation present in 1928 is still in the family. "She played all kinds of popular music for her own enjoyment, including rag-time and even stride," says Allan. "She rattled them off by following the melody line and filling in the bass chords and notes on her own." Both Al and Ron grew up listening to her music and enjoying the tunes she liked to play.

Allan arrived on the scene in December 1939 and Ron in February 1946. Ron still lives in the house his parents purchased when he was four years old. The house is located in Tacoma's Proctor District not far from the public schools where they received most of their music education. Their sister Connie was born in 1943. Although she never pursued music, she is an excellent artist and calligrapher.

As the eldest, Allan was first to take up a music instrument. He became interested when he attended a summer music program sponsored by the school district during the

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*Rustad - continued from page 3*

two summers prior to his junior-high years: “The class I attended was for brass players, so I learned on my dad’s trumpet, and at the end of each summer we played a concert at Wright Park in Tacoma. I really enjoyed it, so when I enrolled at Mason Junior High, I was determined to earn a spot in the school’s junior band. I was not particularly good, but I was very interested. Band director Del Jones, a great teacher who had also directed bands for the local Shriners and Elks lodges, thought I could play tuba, so he gave me lessons – for free – in the mornings before class. I found playing tuba much easier than trumpet.

“My closest music pal in junior high and high school was Dave Todd, who moved after college to Vancouver, B. C. where he formed the Lions Gate Jazz Band and co-founded the Hot Jazz Club, a non-profit featuring live traditional jazz five nights a week. Dave’s father had accumulated a great record collection, and we gained experience listening and playing along with his traditional jazz records.

“I enrolled at Stadium High School in 1954 and played tuba in the band all three years. Bill Cole, who had retired from the Stan Kenton Band, was the director, and we learned music of all kinds from him, including classical, big band, show tunes, and jazz arrangements. In addition to Dave on trumpet, Ken Wiley played trombone in the band. The three of us graduated together in 1957.” Wiley, of course, is still on the radio at KNKX where he has hosted a jazz show every Sunday for more than 35 years.

Allan’s parents gave him a trombone during his senior year, and he studied with Robert A. Hewins, who also had been Dave Todd’s cornet teacher. After graduation, they continued their music with jam sessions in the Rustad living room: “Mom played piano, Dave cornet, Wiley trombone, with me on tuba. I’d picked up a C-Melody sax which I played sometimes, too. My brother Ron was too young to play with us, but he enjoyed listening to the music and hanging around with the older guys.”

Ron, in fact, already had been influenced by Allan’s taste in music. “Al turned me on to the music with old records,” he recalls.

“He used to buy old 78s at Goodwill for five cents, and we’d play them on our old phonographs. I remember liking such songs as ‘Old Man Sunshine Little Boy Bluebird,’ ‘Button Up Your Overcoat,’ – oh, there were so many others – and instrumentals, too. We had ancient tube radios in our rooms – an Atwater Kent and a Brunswick – and we would play them all the time.”



*Ron Rustad with his beloved bari sax*

Ron took his first music lessons at an early age: “My parents gave me a Buescher alto saxophone and enrolled me in the school district’s summer music program before third grade. I played in the beginning band and enjoyed it, so they paid for lessons from a teacher near our house. He was an accordion player who didn’t know much about saxophone. He had me doing more transposing than playing, so I dropped the lessons and played in school bands all through grade school, junior high, and high school.”

Like his brother before him, Ron enrolled at Stadium in the fall of 1960 and found a niche when band director Joe Wheeler needed a baritone saxophonist, and Ron volunteered: “I always liked the sound of the bari, so as soon as Joe asked my hand went

up immediately. We played a wide range of music, including opera and classical pieces by Wagner and others, which I enjoyed very much. Tannhauser Overture was a favorite of mine. I also was invited to join a combination stage band made up of students from Wilson, Lincoln, and Stadium High. It gave us a chance to meet a lot of kids from other schools.” Joe Wheeler, by the way, would later establish the Centrum arts center near Port Townsend.

During the 1962-’63 school year, Ron became a founding member of the Galaxies, a Top-40 rock-and-roll cover band organized by high-school bandmate Mark Eubanks, who played tenor saxophone and later went on to have a successful career as a classical bassoonist. “We traded off playing gigs at school dances and nightclubs on alternate weekends with bands like the Sonics and the Wailers. I knew all those guys. I played bari sax because it blended better with the tenor on rhythm and blues tunes than an alto. My parents knew a salesman from Tacoma Music, and they bought me a Mark VI Selmer baritone with a Low A key. It cost \$675, which was a lot of money, but it was a great deal even then.”

Ron’s vocal duties with the Galaxies were primarily as a duet and back-up singer, with an occasional solo thrown in: “Listening to old recordings, my favorites were singers like Al Jolson, Bing Crosby, and Fats Waller. In the late ‘50s and early ‘60s, I used to sing along to rock and roll by the hour. With the Galaxies, I mostly sang doo-wop harmonies – even falsetto if you can believe that – plus solo features on two Ronnie Dove tunes – ‘Right or Wrong’ and ‘Say You.’”

After graduation, Ron stayed with the Galaxies until June 1965 when the Navy called him to active duty as a ferryboat repairman at Pearl Harbor and as an engineer on a fleet tugboat in the South Pacific and Vietnam. Upon his honorable discharge in 1967, he returned to Tacoma and continued to play gigs with the Galaxies until the band broke up after a final recording session in 1969.

Ron’s discharge also gave him his first opportunity to play traditional jazz with his brother. “Ron was quick to pick up the music

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*Ron and Al, a long time ago.*



*The Galaxies, 1963. L-R: Front - Chuck Naubert, Bill Slyter, Bob Koch;  
Back - Ron Rustad, Bob Lowery, Mark Eubanks*



*Cornucopia Concert Band, Fort Casey, 2017. Bandmaster, Allan Rustad in striped blazer.*

*Rustad - continued from page 4*

when he got out of the Navy,” recalls Allan. “We were still holding jam sets in the family living room. The sessions settled into a group which included Weldon Johnson, trumpet; Ken Wiley, trombone; Ron, clarinet; Dick Weber, piano; Roy Jacobsen, guitar; Denny MacGougan, banjo; Jin Herron, drums; and me on tuba. We called the band ‘the Fordrobians and Weldon,’ a name which had no meaning or purpose other than to be silly. Wiley rounded up quite a few gigs at places like the Two ‘J’s Tavern, Engine House No. 9, the Virginia V, plus an election rally at Slovenia Hall.”

Obviously, music for the Rustads was a method of self-expression rather than a means of making a living. Allan earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Washington State and worked as a mechanical engineer specializing in machine and hydraulic design for the maritime industry. Ron parlayed his naval experience into a career as an all-around seaman, working as a submarine mechanic for the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, an oiler for the state ferry system, a fireman on the Virginia V, and as a licensed engineer for both the Tacoma Tugboat Co. and the Pierce County Ferry system. His last job was with Olympic Tug and Barge where he served as an engineer, able-bodied seaman, and cook, until 2012.

After Allan married Nancy in 1975 and purchased a home on Seattle’s Capitol Hill, their neighbor Steve Joseph told them about the newly formed Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society and its monthly concerts at the Russian Center. Before long, Al and Ron were playing at the society’s jam sessions held in the back room. Eventually, Ron’s playing caught the ear of Rainier Jazz Band leader Barry Durkee who invited him to play clarinet as a replacement for Don Denzin who was leaving the area.

Ron played clarinet with the Rainier for two years until George Goldsberry left the Uptown Lowdown Jazz Band and took over on clarinet in late 1979: “The move worked out great,” Ron recalls. “George was a gas. I had sung a few songs with the band before he came aboard, but afterward the number of vocals gradually increased. That was Bob Pelland’s call. He became the leader in 1980

when Barry died. He chose most of the tunes, and he’d pass out the charts. At first, band rehearsals were in Edmonds once a week, and then in Seattle and Bellevue. I tried to make them all except when my job made it impossible. I did a lot of commuting from Tacoma over the years.”

“I love the music. I approach a gig or a rehearsal with the attitude that ‘this is going to be a good time.’ I prefer songs that tell a story. I like to throw in the verse if the guys know it. I try to adapt and match the feel of the band. One of my favorites is Irving Berlin’s ‘When I Leave the World Behind.’ I also like ‘Sweet Lotus Blossom.’ The tune gives me freedom to play around, but I have to listen to the band with particular care to blend in. And ‘Tain’t No Sin to Take Off Your Skin’ has a scat chorus which is fun. There are others, but they aren’t coming to mind right now.

“When I’m practicing a new tune, I’m always going over phrases, thinking about what to emphasize and when to take a breath. I don’t have the lung power I used to, and I can’t sustain notes as long. In the past, I’d use throat discs to get through a festival because I was raw. I’m more mellow now. When I joined the Ain’t No Heaven Seven five or six years ago, Terry Rogers came up with some new songs, like ‘What A Little Moonlight Can Do’ and ‘Where the Lazy River Goes By,’ which Gene Silberberg did a great job charting and transposing into keys I could sing.

“After the Rainier band broke up in the 1990s, I didn’t have many regular gigs, but I kept my voice in shape by sitting in occasionally with Dave Holo’s New Orleans Quintet in Seattle at the New Orleans Restaurant. We had a lot of fun, and I was happy to land the band a few gigs at the Spar in Tacoma.”

Ron was still the Rainier band’s clarinetist in 1979 when his fellow bandsman Jeff Hughes invited Allan and Nancy to accompany him on a Trailways bus to the Sacramento jazz festival on Memorial Day weekend. Still reveling in the festival’s great music on the return trip, Al and Jeff decided to form an orchestra modeled after the small-town concert bands prevalent in the early part of the 20th century.

“Jeff was really excited,” Allan recalls. “He knew a lot of woodwind players from the University of Washington, and I knew some brass players. He and Nancy are great punsters. They came up with ‘cornucopia’ as a name because its original definition as a ‘horn of plenty’ and its inversion to ‘plenty of horn’ both represented what we were trying to do. So, we settled on ‘Cornucopia Concert Band.’”

Allan already possessed an apple box full of arrangements his trombone teacher Robert Hewins gave him. Hewins, who was about 80 at the time of Al’s lessons, had directed a fire and police association concert band years earlier in Sioux City, Iowa before moving to Tacoma. After adding his grandfather’s box of old dance-hall sheet music to the collection, Allan had at his fingertips a treasure trove of ragtime, march, and novelty pieces from which to choose.

Early rehearsals were held in Allan and Nancy’s living room. The Cornucopia band’s first concert took place in July 1979 at the Green Lake summer fair. The orchestra then included Jerry Warden and Jeff Hughes, trumpets; Katherine Hallgrimson and Ron Rustad, clarinets; John Lane, trombone; Linnea Cookson, tenor sax; Herb Hamilton, bassoon; Jeanette Yen, oboe; Ronnie Pierce, flute; and Allen, tuba. In its early years, the orchestra played for several of our PSTJS jam sets at the Russian Center and the Mountaineers Club. More recently, it appeared as a featured band in the early 2000s.

Since its beginning, the volunteer orchestra has grown in size and stature. With the addition of recruits from community theaters and an ever-increasing network of acquaintances, the band expanded to 24 members during its peak years. In 1989, the orchestra participated as a touring band in the Washington State Centennial Arts program in celebration of the state’s 100th anniversary. Beginning in 1988, the orchestra also took part in the King County Arts Program by performing at venues all over the county.

After 40 years, the Cornucopia now plays mostly at senior centers and retirement homes for special occasions like Octoberfest, Mardi

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*Rustad - continued from page 6*

Gras, and the Fourth of July. Allan has more than once asked band members whether they think it's time to quit, but they won't hear of it. Now numbering 18-20 musicians, they always say "We're having too much fun." Al agrees: "Making music together is the greatest way I can think of to build a strong community. Some have been members for more than 30 years. I can't imagine not gathering to play music with them. We are all family."

So next season, after COVID-19 abates enough for the Ain't No Heaven Seven band to be rescheduled, refresh your recollection by rereading this article so you can take an extra special look at the Rustad brothers from Tacoma, who have given us so much enjoyment over the years. In case you don't already know it, Ron will be the one with the bushy beard, standing at the front, singing for all he is worth; and Allan the one sporting a handlebar mustache, sitting in the back, pumping away on the big brass horn.

**~ A REMINDER ~**  
**To those members whose dues renewals are due in April and May, please mail them in soon.**  
**Thank you!**

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