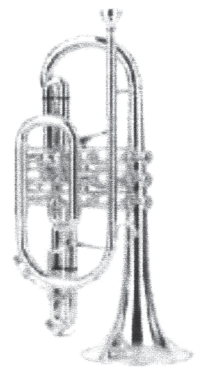


# JAZZ SOUNDINGS

THE PUGET SOUND TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY



Summer 2020

Volume 45, Number 7

## SEATTLE MEMORIES

by Jeff Hughes

*To readers who have attended the Lacey, San Diego, and Friday Harbor jazz festivals, Jeff Hughes has been a familiar sight (and sound) for many years as cornettist with the Paramount and the Wolverines jazz bands. What some readers may not know is that during the 1970s Jeff spent five years playing jazz in the Seattle area while attending the University of Washington as a graduate student in biological oceanography. Recent profiles in this publication featuring Steve Wright, Bob Pelland, and the Rustad brothers attest to the lasting impression Jeff made on the music scene while he was here. Happily, he has responded to our request for an interview about those days by writing his own reminiscence below.*



*Jeff Hughes ... then*

As a high-schooler I was a devotee of Herb Alpert and Al Hirt, both very popular in the '60s. One summer, I concentrated on learning the 1000+ tunes in the bootleg "Musicians' Bible," Volume One. Many of those tunes were favorites of my dad. I became attracted to the cornet, for its warmer, more personal tone, especially after my dad's close friend and pitching great, David "Lefty" McKeag, played for us "Just a Cottage Small by a Waterfall" one Sunday in our kitchen. Lefty, in addition to owning a popular restaurant in South Yarmouth (Cape Cod), was a fine local cornettist.

While at Boston University, I played in general business bands on weekends, but it was there I heard my first recordings of Bix Beiderbecke, on the recommendation of my roommate's mom. I was hooked! Even though my first Bix record was just a scratchy old recording of the Original Wolverines on the French BYG label, it was as if a lightning bolt had struck me when I put a needle to the record in our living room after my folks had gone to bed. The liner notes were written in French, deepening for me the mystery of the main man! I strove to interpret the notes, but they only further piqued my passion to learn more, and I delved into all I could find in print and on vinyl about and by Bix.

At the time, I had been sitting in on Friday evenings with a trio of professionals (organ, tenor sax, drums ... I wish I could recall their names!) at a Weymouth MA steakhouse ("Hackett's," I think it was, but nothing to do with another inspiration of mine, the famous cornettist Bobby Hackett). That night I first heard Bix, I rushed off to play with them, with my new epiphany bright in my heart. I don't



*... and now*

know how I sounded or what I played, but I was inspired to play out. (They used to like to feature me on "The Midnight Sun", a '50's tune I never thought of as Bixian, but with all those chromatics, maybe not such a stretch!)

When I entered UW's Graduate School of Oceanography in 1973, I resolved to find and play in a traditional-jazz band, and posted a small note advertising my interest on the board at the Last Exit on Brooklyn, an old coffee house in the U District. I had been playing for dancing on weekends at the Ballard Elks Club with my second cousin, Roy Smith, on Hammond organ.

One evening a most curious fellow came in, wearing a watch cap with a tuft of his hair coming out the top, and proceeded to introduce himself: "Hi Jeff, I'm Ronnie

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# Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept. 20 **Cancelled**  
Oct. 18 **The latest information about these**  
Nov. 15 **dates will be available on the website**  
Dec. 20 **(pstjs.org) as soon as it's available.**

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

## ~ PREZ SEZ ~

After deadheading my plants in the front yard, it occurred to me how easy it is to adjust the plant to make it beautiful and then how difficult it is to be in charge of an organization like ours. All of us would love to be able to just hire a band, congregate at the usual venue, dance, listen to great music and socialize. Who could've thought that a pandemic would be greater than all of us? September looked like a good target, but now we are hearing of a recycling of this ugly virus and that date may also be out of the question! So now we can only hope for the rest of 2020 to be free so we can put this thing behind us. I, for one, miss all of the elements of our Society and look forward to that day when it will happen again. Meanwhile, mask up wherever you go, stay safe and healthy.

Jim Blokzyl

## Notice:

**The September concert  
has been  
cancelled.**



*Hughes continued from page 1*

Pierce.” Many suspicious eyes turned his way, but it was okay because he was an Elk! With him was a tall young man, Brad Smith. They were interested in starting a group, in response to my ad. Soon, we were rehearsing in Ronnie’s old teenage nightclub on Second Avenue, The Vault. The group became the Salmon City Seven and eventually included Don Anderson on trombone, Ronnie on reeds, Brad on banjo, myself, and a changing cast of rhythm players like pianists Jimmy Buettner and the extraordinary Buck Evans, Skip McDaniel (bass), and Dave Tuss or Paul Killian (drums).

We played often at the Seattle Center, where Ronnie had performed at the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair (as Skinny Malone and His Hot Bananas!). Ronnie (on drums) and I also played with Bernie Holstensen (organ) at senior dances called the Meet and Mix. For a few seasons, Ronnie and I played up in Port Townsend at the old “Judges’ Chambers” restaurant, performing with pianist Dan



*Engine House No. 9 Tacoma Concert Band, 1970s: L-R, Ken Wiley, Al Rustad, Jeff Hughes, Ron Rustad, and Danny MacGoughan.*

Grinstead and the wonderful young singer Chrissy McFadden. The place was owned by Dick Walker (drums) and co-managed by Gary Provonsha (tuba). Other players I recall

fondly around that time include Dick Adams (soprano sax), Dr. Terry Rogers (reeds), and Gregg Keplinger and Sy Turner (drums). I did a summer season up on San Juan Island while a grad student at the Friday Harbor marine labs, and subbed up there for a great Dixieland trumpet man, Tom Skoog.

Ronnie introduced me to some of the notable Seattle professionals who were still very active at the time. On Sundays, many would gather at Ken and Joanie Nelson’s house for memorable jams, and I fortunately got to hear and play with them. A few I recall are Rollie Morehouse (clarinet), Johnny Wittwer (piano), Freddie Greenwell (tenor sax), Terry Crews (reeds), and Floyd Standifer (trumpet). These were great musicians. And Ken (piano) and Joanie, a funny, sassy Aussie vocalist, were tops, as well.

In 1975, I attended the first meeting of the Puget Sound Traditional Jazz Society. What a great opportunity to share with like-minded folks! Barry Durkee (banjo) approached me about joining his Rainier Jazz Band, and what fun we had at rehearsals preparing for the Sacramento Jazz Festival. Barry was the festival’s former treasurer and playing at that festival was indeed a sacrament for him, and he lined up a few gigs around the Seattle area as well. Other members included Ron Rustad (vocals and clarinet), John Loughlin (drums), Bob Pelland (piano), Randy Keller or Al Rustad (tuba), and Al Barrows (trombone).

Ron and I would sing a duet on “When Lindy Comes Home” to the amusement of  
*continued on page 4*



*Paramount Jazz Band of Boston, 1989: Top row, Jimmy Mazzy, Jeff Hughes, Steve Wright, Ray Smith. Bottom row, Robin Verdier, Gary Rodberg and Chuck Stewart. The band played at our PSTJS concerts in 1990 and 1993. Seattle Memories by Jeff Hughes*

*Hughes - continued from page 3*

the audience, and the band would dig in on challenging numbers like the “Wrought Iron Rag.” As you might have read in a previous column, Al Rustad and I conceived the Cornucopia Concert Band on the trip home from Sacramento, a project he and his wife Nancy, a woman of undeniable spirit and warmth, have carried forward with passion and commitment. (The band has come so far from where we started!) It was in the Rainier Jazz Band where I learned a lot of the trad-jazz repertoire, thanks especially to the wonderful arrangements by Bob Pelland, who I’m happy to see is still a driving force behind the excellent Grand Dominion Jazz Band. (I was sorry to miss him and so many others this June at the recently canceled Lacey Jazz Festival.

Around this time I met the eccentric, lovable, John Holte, who had a passion for ‘30s swing music, composing and arranging his own tunes as well as curating lots of stock arrangements. When I arrived in Seattle, his 10-piece New Deal Rhythm Band was all the rage, playing greatly entertaining sets for 20-somethings new to the craze over swing music. The usual rock-n-roll crowds in the bars went nuts over the band and the antics of its lead singers, Phil Shallat and Cheryl Bentyne, who still sings with the world-famous Manhattan Transfer vocal quartet.

For various reasons, the New Deal band dissolved, and John asked me to join his new iteration, Swingland Express. The band included some fine young players, including Jeff Hay (trombone) and Jimmy Rasmussen (lead trumpet), with Ronnie (alto sax), John (lead alto), John Draper (tenor sax), Paul Killian (drums), Skip McDaniel (string bass), Odessa Swan, Howard Hays and “Sonny” Edwards (vocals), and the remarkable pianist, vocalist, and personality, Buck Evans.

After playing downtown for the 1976 bicentennial, we were invited to play a 5-nighter during the summer at one of Seattle’s “plum” venues, the Windjammer restaurant at Shilshole Bay. We were the envy of the musical establishment! It was there I met two special benefactors and music fans, Val and Claire Golding, who became my dear friends and family away from home.

Later, the band traveled to Portland, reprising the rock-club response of that earlier surprise, followed by several weekends in Bellingham and a rather surprising New Years’ eve party in Spokane (ask me about that

sometime!) John Holte went on to write and record more of his originals, with a band of mostly the same personnel that he rehearsed at the College Club in the U District, and helped out greatly by bassists Pete Leinonen and Kurt Armbruster (who later authored “Before Seattle Rocked,” a book about jazz in Seattle from the ‘40s through the ‘70s).

A few other memories before I left Seattle in 1979. The Sunday sessions at the East Lake Tavern, featuring the Great Excelsior Jazz Band, were incredible. What a band! Featured in the front line were Ken Wiley (trombone), Bob Jackson (beautiful bluesy trumpet, sadly recently passed away), and the remarkable Ham Carson (reeds, especially tenor sax and bari). Skip McDaniel (bass), Joe Loughmuller (drums), Jake Powel (guitar, sometimes C-melody sax) and Bob Gilman (piano) comprised the swinging rhythm section. I was fortunate to sit in occasionally, and it was a real pleasure to swing so easily with such perfect support.

Playing with Ham was so inspirational, what with his great approach on whatever instrument he chose to play. Really, he was the ultimate expression of “swing,” and I don’t mean the commercial concept of that term, but rather the essence of great jazz, whatever idiom. Inspiration, innovation, rhythmic freedom, fearlessness, drive, tone, sincerity and soul. A wholly honest, creative musician. That was Hamilton Carson. He stood apart, and proudly so, without ever lording or commanding, just supreme in his gift, and happy to share it.

In the late ‘70s, Bob West (historian, trombone) introduced me to that super musician and entertainer, Mickey Martin (aka “Diamond-Tooth Mickey”), for whom I put together a band which included Andy Carr (piano), and Robin Kutz (guitar). We played quite a few dates at Crawfish Alley, downtown. Mickey was an all-around musician a soulful singer, pianist, and guitarist as well as a fine tap dancer. He seemed right out of the old school when an entertainer had to do so many things well. And, he shared my birthday!

Mickey came up through Chicago’s rough South Side. He was a curious mix of devout Christian and believer in the supernatural. One day, we were walking downtown when he suddenly looked down, and scooped up a \$20 bill, saying something like, “Oh, this happens to me all the time. Thank you Jesus!”



*Jeff Hughes, a recent photo.*

(He even kept a shrine in his hotel room!). One night, we drove up north to a black blues club where he introduced me to the guys, and we played for an African-American audience. I miss Mickey ... one of a kind, indeed.

Speaking of one of a kind, Ronnie Pierce brilliant player and teacher, quirky and crazy-like-a-fox, sweet and thoughtful, simple and complex, totally dedicated to music and his kids was my dearest friend. A member of the Seattle Jazz Hall of Fame, he was famous (notorious?) in the local music scene, and would transport name players like Stan Getz when they arrived for gigs at Jazz Alley, Ernestine’s, and elsewhere. He even arranged an afternoon for us with the famous trumpeter, Freddie Hubbard, a very nice guy, and also introduced me to Slim Gaillard (“Ah, Jeffer-oonie, my man”).

Ronnie and I stayed in touch over the years, and I’d always visit with him (hang out, really) whenever I was in Seattle. We were even planning an album together, until his “untimely” passing at age 90. I say that because, despite infirmities in his later years and he was playing gigs right up to the end he seemed timeless to me. Words can’t express...

More recently, I had the privilege to reunite with Brad Smith, the banjoist I mentioned earlier. He and I were close when he was an undergrad UW engineering student, and I a grad student. We played in several groups, as noted, had all kinds of crazy adventures, and shared an interest in not only trad jazz, but also classical music and

*continued on page 5*



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*Hughes - continued from page 4*

especially more modern forms and composers. Brad was even then a completely original musician on the banjo, with a ferocious strumming style and adventurous exploration of new chords.

Early on, Brad played the entire "Rhapsody in Blue" for me, on banjo! He went on to compose pieces for the Seattle Chamber Orchestra, including his "Concerto for Banjo" with Brad as a soloist-in-concert, circa 1978, as well as many other originals written in an advanced dissonant style, also known as 12-tone or tone-row style. This unique musician and composer deserves a place in the Banjo Hall of Fame! He lives with his wife in an idyllic setting west of Olympia.

And, to conclude, back here in the East we are working up a recording of Buck Evans originals. Buck splits his time between Juneau, AK and Seattle, and has composed more than 200 songs. A few years back, we put together a band to record 19 of his tunes (issued as "The Brahmin Bellhops 'Who's She Jazzin' Now?'" on Stomp Off 1305), and we're planning another after the current health threat subsides. In the meantime, Rivermont Records has produced a CD of the Brahmin Bellhops doing hot numbers from the '20s and early '30s. This, called "Lucky Day," is out now and has just become available in their new catalog. I hope you'll check it out!

My time in Seattle is so memorable, not just for all the music that was swirling around in those days, but also for the most wonderful, unforgettable people who enriched my life. I'll be forever grateful for the opportunity to have stayed and played awhile.

*Jeff Hughes, Falmouth, MA*

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