THE PUGET SOUND TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY AZZ SOUNDINGS



March 2015 Volume 40, Number 3

GERRY GREEN'S CRESCENT CITY SHAKERS BRING A FAMILIAR LINE-UP TO PSTJS ON MARCH 15

By George Swinford

Last year Gerry and his band entertained us at our March concert. For this year's March event he will lead the same top-notch group, plus one. The band will include Gerry on clarinet and sax, Jim Armstrong on cornet and trombone, with banjo and guitar by Bill Dixon. The pianist will be Bob Pelland. He and the above three Canadians are long-time members of the festival-favorite Grand Dominion JB. Completing the rhythm section on the 15th will be Dave Brown on bass, with Mike Daugherty added this year on drums. With his hot traditional-style drumming, Mike will be a welcome addition.

Expect this sextet to bring us a variety of numbers played in musical styles from the first four decades of jazz. From long association these guys know what to expect from each other. They'll provide a maximum of hot improvisation, no charts required. We can surely look forward to several vocals from Jim Armstrong, and it will be no surprise to hear a few from Mike Daugherty and others.

Come on out on the 15th, bring your dancing shoes and spend a rewarding afternoon with your jazz friends and the Crescent City Shakers.

WHERE:

Ballard Elks Lodge, 6411 Seaview Ave. NW, Seattle.

WHEN:

1 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. **Sunday, March 15 ADMISSION:**

\$12 PSTJS members; \$15 non-members. Pay only at door.

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.

Note: please see important notice about food service on page 4 - 3rd column

Notes From the Prez

As I mentioned last month, it's time to send applications for Camp Heebie Jeebies summer Jazz week.

The dates are July 19 - July 25th. The camp is located on Lake Crescent, 30 miles west of Port Angeles on Highway 101. The name of the camping site is Camp David Jr.

This will be my 8th year volunteering at camp and I look forward to it more each year. Recently I read a review of the learning topics and I'd like to share it with you. It appeared in the Vancouver Dixieland Jazz Society news bulletin.

"The students in the program learn the basics of playing traditional forms of jazz: chords and chord sequences; improvisation; how to play with 'big ears,' listening to the others in the band and playing something that blends into and enhances the overall sound without intruding in another instruments' 'space'; and how to put together a good solo. Folks hearing these young musicians play for the first time frequently ask 'where is their music?' The short answer is that, unless it is a complicated tune, they don't need any. Like all good trad jazz musicians they are learning the art of composing on the fly known as improvisation."

The students must be at least 12 years of age, and we love to have them continue on as long as they wish to. Usually after high school graduation, their lives become much more involved, however several have come back as teacher assistants. We also welcome adults as students. Please check out the camp website www. campheebiejeebies.us. If you know a budding musician who would like the opportunity to attend Jazz Camp, please have them either call me 425-890-6605 or fill out the application/registration form and mail it to me at 5226 236th Pl S.E. Issaquah, WA 98029. Cheers, Judy

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

Mar 15 Gerry Green's Crescent City Shakers

Apr 19 Ray Skjelbred & Friends

May 17 holotradband

Jun 21 New Orleans Quintet

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JAZZ SOUNDINGS

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

Gigs for Local Bands

BELLINGHAM TRADITIONAL JAZZ SOCIETY

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

Mar. 7 Bob Storms' Dixieland All-Stars

April 4 Ray Skjelbred's First Thursday Band

May 2 Leigh Smith's Maple Leaf Jazz Band

June 6 Arnt Arntzen Band

DAVE HOLO TRIO

Salty's in West Seattle, 1936 Harbor Avenue. S.W Seattle, WA 98126 206-937-1600 Information visit: http://saltys.com/seattle)

Mar. 6 5 - 8pm

Mar. 20 5 - 8pm

GREATER OLYMPIA DIXIELAND JAZZ SOCIETY

2nd Sundays 1:00-4:30pm Elks Lodge. 1818 Fourth Ave., Olympia

Mar. 8 Uptown Lowdown Lite

Apr. 12 Columbia Classic

PEARL DJANGO

Mar. 6 North City Bistro 8 pm 1520 NE 177th St; Shoreline, WA; 206-365-4447

Mar. 7 The Conway Muse 7:30 pm 18444 Spruce, Conway, WA; 360-445-3000

Mar. 20, 21 Traditions Café and World Folk At 8pm 300 5th Avenue SW, Olympia WA 360-705-2819

Mar. 22 French Fest French American Chamber of Commerce at Seattle Center Armory/Center House (Time: TBA)

Mar. 28 Under the Red Umbrella 7 pm Call first - this may sell out! 1502 Rucker Avenue, Everett, WA 98201 425.252.9193

RAY SKJELBRED AND THE YETI CHASERS

Mar. 28 5 - 7:30pm at the Royal Room, 5000 Rainier Ave. S., Seattle April 11 5 - 7:30pm at the Royal Room, 5000 Rainier Ave. S., Seattle

UPTOWN LOWDOWN JAZZ BAND

Mar. 08 Olympia Elks 1-4:40pm Uptown Swing

Mar. 15 White Rock Jazz 2-5 pm-Royal Canadian Legion Hall White Rock, BC Uptown Lite





On Your Dial.....

Saturday

7 - 12 pm Swing Years and Beyond KUOW 94.9 FM

Sunday 3 -6 pm Art of Jazz, Ken Wiley,

Wiley, KPLU 88.5 FM

Alex Hill mastered all facets of jazz in the early 1930s

By Hal Smith

Alex Hill is probably best known as a great arranger, but he was also an ace pianist who composed (and co-composed) some of the most memorable popular songs of the 1930s.

Hill was born in 1906 in Little Rock, Ark. His father, a minister in the African Methodist Episcopalian Church, wanted his son to follow in his footsteps. But the youngster became fascinated with music and soon was getting piano lessons from his mother. Despite parental opposition, the teen-ager began sneaking away to attend jam sessions with other youngsters, such as Alphonse Trent and Snub Mosley. Finally he left home in the early 1920s to join Homer Griffin's Orchestra in Tulsa, Ok.

Hill played with several territory bands, including the Southern Serenaders, George Morrison and Terence "T" Holder, then he wound up in Los Angeles in 1927. By then Hill was also a skilled composer and arranger. He wrote for the Paul Howard Quality Serenaders, who recorded Hill's chart of his own "Quality Shout." While in L.A., Hill worked with Speed Webb's orchestra and Mutt Carey's Jeffersonians, which provided "atmosphere music" on silent movie sets, in addition to dance-hall work.

Next, Hill joined Andy Kirk's orchestra for a brief stint, then relocated to Chicago. He arrived in Chicago in 1928, while the city was still an epicenter of hot jazz. Hill's first recording was done in Chicago on Oct 9th of that year, with Albert Wynn. The following day he recorded Jimmy Wade playing the Hill compositions "Mississippi Wobble" and "crying My Blues Away." The same years, Hill's "Beau Koo Jack" became a hit and was recorded by Louis Armstrong, Omer Simeon, Clarence Williams and others.

Hill became a staff arranger for the Melrose Bros. Music Co. and stayed busy as a sideman on club dates and recording

sessions. He replaced Earl Hines in Jimmie Noone's Apex Club Orchestra and contributed several arrangements to the Noone Group. He also recorded with them and his piano solos on "Chicago Rhythm" and "I Must Have That Man" illustrate his respect for Fats Waller and Hines, but with an individualistic touch. Hill also recorded with Jabbo Smith, Junie C. Cobb and Ikey Robinson. His only solo records ("Stompin" em Down" and "Tack Head Blues") were recorded in 1929, along with his recorded debut as a bandleader.

The Alex Hill orchestra recordings of "Southbound," "Toogaloo Shout" and "Dyin' With The Blues" are classics, with superb arrangements and first-class hot-jazz playing, including the leader's piano work.

In 1930, Hill joined the Sammy Stewart Orchestra and moved on to New York City. There he began a productive associations co-composer with Waller and Andy Razaf. This Waller-Hill collaboration produced such standards as "I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby" and "Keep a Song in Your Soul. Other famous Alex Hill numbers from this period include "I Would Do Anything For You" (co-composed by Claude Hopkins and Bob Williams,) "Delta Bound," "Baby Brown," "Draggin' My Heart Around," and "You Were Only Passing Time With Me."

In the early 1030s, Hill's compositions received wide exposure on recording by King Oliver, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Red Nichols, Billy Banks' Rhythmakers and Waller. In 1933, Hill briefly went back to Chicago, working as Adelaide Hall's accompanist, but he soon returned to New York City. Upon his return, he fronted a big band for reedman Mezz Mezzrow and also wrote several arrangements for the group (though "Old Fashioned Love" is the only one that Mezzrow's band recorded.) Hill also participated in an outstanding recording

session by Eddie Condon. In addition to Condon and Hill, the all-star lineup included Max Kaminsky, trumpet; Floyd O'Brien, trombone; Pee Wee Russell, clarinet; Bud Freeman, tenor sax; Artie Bernstein, bass; and Sid Catlett, drums.

Hill's "Madame Dynamite" and "Tennessee Twilight" were recorded on that day, which is considered to be one of the best small band recordings in jazz history.

In 1934, Hill signed on as staff arranger for Irving Mills Music and sold compositions to Clarence Williams Music, Pace and Handy and Joe Davis Music Co. He continued to arrange for many orchestras, including Paul Whiteman's, Willie Bryant's, Claude Hopkins', the Mills Blue Rhythm Band and Waller's Big Band. He also briefly acted as musical director for Ina Rae Hutton's all-girl orchestra.

In September and October of 1933, Hill recorded for the last time with his "Hollywood Sepians." On the first session, he played piano in the orchestra, which recorded his arrangements of his own "Ain't It Nice?" and Waller's "Functionizin." On the October recording, Garnet Clark took over the piano chair as Hill sang his compositions "Song of the Plow" and "Let's Have A Jubilee." Within two sessions, Hill's mastery of composition arranging and instrumental and vocal performance was simply illustrated for all time!

By 1935 he was still composing, arranging and performing (substituting for an ill Duke Ellington in Ellington's own orchestra.) But overwork and heavy drinking were catching up with Hill and he became ill with tuberculosis.

He was offered a job as bandleader at New York's Ubangi Club but was unable to make more than one rehearsal before entering a hospital. As the illness progressed, he decided to live out his days at home and finally returned to Little Rock.

Continued on page 4

WHAT KEY?

By Ray Skjelbred

Most listeners are aware that music exists in keys. The scales and patterns in each key are the same - but different keys pitch the music higher or lower in range and maintain a uniformity by adding sharps or flats to the patterns. In addition there are many little details of jazz wisdom and insight that musicians employ when they work with each other. One big thing is that the majority of songs have a standard key. People learn songs in many ways - through sheet music, listening to records or playing with others, but experienced musicians end up knowing what the "standard" key is for a given song. So if I play "At the Jazz Band Ball" I will play the verse in Gm and the Chorus in Bb. If I play with Bob Schulz he will do the same. If I ended up jamming with musicians in Poland and they called "At the Jazz Band Ball" I could rest assured that they also would play in the same key, even though we might not be able to carry on a conversation. Well, I would tell them I like the novelist Joseph Conrad, a mighty Pole.

Standard keys for the kinds of music we tend to call "standards" are usually written in keys that match the human voice, but particularly the male voice. That might not be fair but it has been the tradition. This means that if a band performs with a woman singer, everyone knows the keys will change to accommodate the range of her voice, which is usually a fourth or fifth interval higher on the scale. Not too difficult to do on most songs, but when the chords are particularly complex, it becomes a challenge, especially for the piano player, the guy who must know them. This is also why you are likely to hear bands

changing keys when a woman is singing. They play the key comfortable for her then change to the key comfortable for them. A big problem for horns is that a woman's key may throw the horn way too high or way too low to play comfortably. Thus, the key change.

Each key seems to have a psychological force. Horns are happier in flat keys like F, Bb, Eb and Ab. Stringed instruments seem to be happier in sharp keys like G and D or A and E. It depends on the way the instrument is designed. Flat keys are easier for horns, but since they play in flat keys most of the time, a sharp key is more of a challenge simply by its unfamiliarity. All this is laid out perfectly on the piano with the black keys serving as sharps and flats. But what is easy or hard? Is one key better than another? C has all white keys which means the reach for a big chord like a 10th, an important device in jazz is easier in C. I like that because I have small hands. Blues music is lovely in C because the blue notes are all black keys and you can make a good sound by smearing down from the raised black key to the lower white key. However, fast songs are very difficult in C because without black notes to hang onto the sensation is like being pushed onto ice with your skates not laced. You need some rebar in your playing. The black notes provide something to hang onto. F and Bb are probably the most popular keys, with just the right amount of rebar. Plenty to hang onto. Ab is OK, but when you get to Db and Gb there are so many flats to keep track of that the playing gets harder.

So you can test this out by talking to musicians. "Sugar" you say. "What key?" You should get the same answer from every musician. "Maple Leaf Rag?" (It's Ab and Db.)

Welcome New Member

KAY McQUEEN

Alex Hill Continued from page 3

Hill was still sending compositions from Little Rock to Mills Music when he died Feb 1, 1037.

Jazz musicians, fans and critics have overwhelmingly approved of Hill's arranging prowess. Gunther Schuller wrote, "Hill was the kind of arranger who made musicians feel at ease and made them sound good." Gilbert M. Erskine wrote, "Hill must have few equals as an arranger. We can only regret that he was given so few opportunities to display his skill." Hill 's associate, trumpeter-arranger Edgar Battle, said, "To this day, Alex Hill is my favorite arranger. In a way, his charts are more typically jazz than any other writer's." And Kaminsky, who played trumpet on the 1933 Condon date with Hill, said "We sure did swing on Alex Hill's arrangements!"

As an arranger, composer, bandleader, pianist and vocalist, Hill was truly a master of all trades.

Reprinted with permission from "Jazz Rambler," San Diego's Dixieland Jazz Societies' newsletter, and from the April 2009 Jazz Soundings and Hal Smith.

Because of supply issues, we will no longer provide sandwiches at our events. However people can order food, breakfast or hamburgers from the Elks. We will continue to have coffee and donuts.







We're looking for new

Members

YOU can help with little effort and that's by bringing just one of your friends or family members into our club. If WE ALL do that, our membership will double.

·



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