

THE CAT'S MEOW



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Jim Hall, Our Fine Percussionist

Lourie Center at Maxcy Gregg Park (just off Pickens near Blossom)

2:30-5:00 pm Sunday, Jan 6, 2019

Jim will be leading the group and getting us off to a good start for the New Year. I am always impressed by Jim's drumming every time I hear him (well yes, Jim is not as showy as Gene Krupa, nor a pioneer like Zutty Singleton, or a discoverer of a great vocalist like Chick Webb – remember Ella Fitzgerald got her start with Chick). But listen to his solos and his interactions with the rest of the guys (& gal) on the bandstand and you will hear a superb drummer. Jim uses the full range of objects at his command from bass drum to wood-blocks to cowbells. But he uses these gimmicky items sparingly and always in good taste. This allows him to put the entire ensemble at his command to really good use.

Of course, most of our members know of Jim's work with Dick Goodwin (both the Quintet and the Big Band). But only long time members are likely to know that Jim was also the principal timpanist with the South Carolina Philharmonic, the South Carolina Lyric Opera and the South Carolina Chamber Orchestra. Plus, Jim organized and led a steel drum band at USC.

But, Jim has quite a resume also. He was the drummer in Les Elgart's Big Band and the Dorsey Brother's Band (after Warren Covington took it over) as well as a significant list of major bands. In addition, Jim worked with a long line of jazz artists including Marion McPartland, Billy Eckstein (my college roommates favorite singer), Tom Scott, Bill Waltrous, and David "fathead" Newman (not a name I'm familiar with).

Jim says he has always considered himself primarily a Big Band Drummer. But along the way, Jim has worked with a lot of big names in show-business too; names like Marian McPartland, Bill Waltrous, Red Skelton and Bob Hope (to do all that, he must have started as a teen-ager). And I was surprised to learn he worked with Barbara Eden (remember "I dream of Jeanie"). But I found that she was a singer as well as an actress. Now that part of his career makes sense.

CAROLINA JAZZ SOCIETY was founded in 1958 to enjoy Dixieland Jazz, one of America's original art forms

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Jim Hall (continued)

There is one important aspect of the music business that most music teachers don't discuss with young musicians; namely the work involved with some instruments, lugging them around, setting them up etc. I'm guessing that youngsters fall in love with an instrument and discover the work involved only after they are hooked. But if you arrive early, you'll see Jim come in with his hand-truck loaded with drums, then watch as he sets each up and positions it precisely.

At big outdoor events, drums can involve a lot of work; getting them from the van to the stage, then onto the stage and setting them up (one drummer advised his son to change to flute after working a large outdoor concert,).

Cozy Cole solved his set-up problem at the Metropole in NYC by hiring an assistant to do it for him. The stage at the Metropole was (is?) very narrow and located behind the bar, maybe 10 feet above the floor. His assistant was a very small adult who had suffered a back injury as a youngster leaving it with a twist. One evening the assistant tripped and Cozy's "Million Dollar Drum Set" almost ended up in a jumble on the floor. But he managed to grab onto something at the last minute to keep everything from crashing onto the floor, but just barely. This elicited great applause from patrons at the bar.

Changing instruments but staying on subject; Woody Herman was a well-known slacker about getting ready. Late in his career, Woody's assistant would put a new reed in Woody's clarinet, warm it up and hand it to him as Woody walked onto the stage (all the other musicians were already in place). The curtain would open, Woody would give the down-beat and the concert would begin.

Woody also had a well known aversion to practicing by this time. He explained, "I play four hours every night, often seven days a week and asked, "Why in the world would I spend extra time warming up and practicing?" (I assume he practiced with the band when they added a new song – but his musicians were all proficient readers and would have a good idea what he and others in the group might do. Maybe they didn't need to practice???)

But this reminds me of the early jazz pianist, Eubie Blake. Even late in life, Eubie practiced four hours every day. While Eubie practiced, his wife did house work upstairs. On his 90th birthday, Eubie said, "Wait a minute, I'm 90 years old and I've practiced three hours and forty-five minutes. That ought to be enough for anyone!" But from upstairs came "**Eubie, fifteen minutes more!**"

Red Smith, Editor