

THE CAT'S MEOW



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Doug Graham Will Entrance Us This Month

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

2:30-5:00 pm Sunday, Feb 3, 2019

I certainly expect to be entranced, based on years of listening to Doug do just that (by the way, my neighbor says that whenever Doug plays “Lullaby of the Leaves”, she gets goosebumps).

When I first joined the Carolina Jazz Society, Tommy Wix was the clarinetist. Tommy was both a very good clarinetist and “Chief Imp”. He added “with no pants on” to every line of the “Sheik of Araby” (at least he’s the first person I heard do that). Tommy played an important role in the success of the society by joining the band shortly after the society was founded. I might add that even though Tommy always had a good time, he didn’t let his impish attitude affect the quality of his music. I think both aspects were real assets to the society.

Later on, the club began inviting a clarinetist from the USC symphony as a special guest. It was interesting to watch the process. In the beginning, Doug would listen to Tommy’s solo and then, build on it. Tommy would improvise something and you would see Doug smile in appreciation. Then Doug would use Tommy’s solo as the basis for a still different interpretation. **The rest, as they say, is history.**

I asked Doug to tell me a bit about his background. Doug says that that he was most influenced by classical players like Robert Marcellus with the Cleveland Orchestra, Harold Wright with the Boston Symphony and Stanley Drucker with the NY Philharmonic. But Doug got one teeny bit of exposure to jazz as a teen-ager. He memorized Pete Fountain’s version of “A Closer Walk” and played it, perhaps at a school function. Doug may have met Pete back then but I don’t know whether he played for Pete or not.

I find it interesting that Doug’s first real exposure to jazz came at the University of Texas. **That’s where Doug met Dick Goodwin and who better to lead a promising musician into the world of jazz!**

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

More info on our website: www.carolinajazzsociety.com and on Facebook

Doug Graham (continued)

Dick was director of the jazz ensemble at UT and encouraged Doug to try out for the group. To Doug's surprise, he was chosen as the lead saxophonist. (Editor's note; **"talent will out!"**).

At UT, Doug became known as the guy with the green horn (a green-horn had a green horn?). Doug's instrument, an ancient Martin sax, picked up a startling green patina while sitting in someone's attic. This allowed Doug to stand out for more than just his musical ability.

Doug said he discovered the "great jazz players" Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw and Eddie Daniels later on. That last name came as a surprise to me. I thought knew all the really good jazz clarinetists and I had never heard of Daniels. Turns out Daniels focused on modern jazz; another surprise, because I thought most modern jazz featured saxes instead of clarinets.

Changing the subject abruptly; when I graduated from the U of F, Uncle Sam sent me to Mitchel AFB on Long Island. Then, being the military, they made use of my degree in Physics by making me the Base Petroleum Officer before deciding they really needed a Property Accounting Officer (presumably physicists should be able to add and subtract – right?).

The upside was that I could go jazz clubs in New York City (or more properly I could as often as I could afford it). My first discovery was a small club in Queens featuring Tony Parenti. It featured a trio with Tony on clarinet together with a bassist and a drummer. You might think an evening of clarinet might be a bit much. But Tony used the full range of his horn. He would start a piece in middle register, drop down for a beautiful low register segment and then drive to the finish in high register. It was like listening to three different instruments. I tried out a number of other clubs but once I discovered Wilber DeParis and his "New Dixieland Jazz" at Jimmy Ryan's on 52nd St, I abandoned the others.

Later on, officers of the short-lived "American Federation of Jazz Societies" met in Washington DC. And the society arranged for us to visit the Smithsonian Institution. The curator, a young black man, heard me mention a somewhat obscure New Orleans Clarinetist from the 40's and 50's (certainly not one of the "Big Names" like Benny Goodman or Artie Shaw). And he interjected, "Oh Man! That cat had the sweetest tone of anybody!" And he was right! I've never heard anyone with a better tone, not even Doug. But I was shocked by the curator's statement. In that era of Bop and Progressive Jazz, I expected a young black man to be dismissive of traditional jazz. To add to my amazement he disappeared into the stacks and came out with the very first cornet that Louis Armstrong ever played along with one of Gene Krupa's drums from the famous '38 Carnegie Hall Concert.

The Pittsburg Baseball Announcer's famed motto was "it's a whole lot better to be lucky than good" and I've been lucky all my life!

Red Smith, Editor