

# THE CAT'S MEOW



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## Special Surprise Guests This Month

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

2:30-5:00 pm Sunday, May 5, 2019

Lauren Meccia and Jim Mings will join the group this month. Jim will bring his guitar across town and Lauren will bring her baritone sax up from Aiken .

Lauren is a "US of C" graduate who teaches at USC-Aiken where she is director of the founder and director of the New Horizons Band in Aiken. By the way, if "US of C" looks strange, get used to it because that is how "Our University" plans to distinguish itself from that upstart university in California from now on.

Getting back on subject, it's been a long time since we've had a baritone-sax on stage and this may even be the first time. But, if truth be told, it's not my favorite sax. The soprano would be my first choice (think Sidney Bechet, Bob Wilber or Jim Ruth). On the other hand, I really liked the team of Gerry Mulligan on baritone and Bob Brookmeyer on valve trombone. The next on my list in the sax family would be the bass sax. Adrian Rollini is still my favorite on that instrument but I also enjoyed Otto Hardwicke who was with Duke Ellington in the early days. And Dick Goodwin tells me one that Ernie Caseres, who played with Bobby Hackett, among others, was one of his favorites on baritone.

My least favorite is the tenor sax (which dominated popular orchestras from the 30's up through the 60's and is probably the favorite of most people). But there are lot's of choices because the sax family is large. For your edification here's a list I found on the internet:

- Sopranino
- Soprano
- Alto
- C Melody
- Tenor
- Baritone
- Bass
- Contrabass

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### Special Guests (continued)

The guitar is another instrument that has been used sparingly in traditional jazz. But the guitar played a big part in the development of Jazz, especially the blues. And it was used in two ways; as an accompaniment while singing (think Blind Lemon Johnson or Leadbelly) or as a rhythm instrument (think Eddie Condon). Interestingly, I've heard it said that Eddie never took a solo on any of his recordings. But he was a fine rhythm guitarist. More importantly, he gave a lot of young musicians their first big break.

And Sister Rosetta Tharpe was one of the first guitarists I ever heard. She had a broadcast out of Nashville (I think) that I could pick up on the radio in Central Florida where I grew up. She did gospel songs primarily but she was both a good singer and a good guitarist who always had a good rhythm going. Plus, she had a very good piano player who got a lot of solo time. And at other times, she had a very good gospel quartet backing her up.

Freddy Green was another pioneering guitarist. He was with Count Basie (the first big band I had ever heard in person). Sadly, my main impression from the Basie concert was how loud it was. The room was small with almost as many musicians on the stage as there were seats for customers. And at that time, I had very sensitive hearing, I could even hear the fly-back transformer in early TV sets at ~ 18,000 Hertz). But my main memory from that concert was how uncomfortably loud it was.

But my favorite guitarist has to be Django Reinhardt, of Gypsy-Jazz Fame. As I've mentioned before, Django was a true gypsy who grew up moving from town to town with his parents in a "caravan" (basically a covered wagon). And even though he lost the use of two of his fingers in a fire that destroyed the family caravan, he taught himself to play as well as before his injury.

But his real transformation as a musician began when he heard Louis Armstrong and other American jazz musicians. He immediately bought records and developed a marvelous gypsy influenced jazz style. He made lot of recordings but he is best known for his work with the "Quintet of the Hot Club of France"; the band he formed with Stephan Grappelly.

You won't be hearing gypsy jazz this month but you will get to hear a superb guitarist. Jim grew up in East Texas, Gladewater, to be precise. And I suspect that had a big influence on his choice of instruments. Then, he studied at UT Austin where he met Dick Goodwin. That's likely to have had an effect on his life also.

By the way, if you've watched "Nature Scene on ETV, you've heard Jim Mings (however, in the interest of full disclosure, I gather there was some overdubbing involving Christopher Berg on the final version that aired).

Red Smith, Editor