

THE CAT'S MEOW



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Bruce Clark & His Trombone

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

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

As most of you know, Bruce was a middle school band director, an under-appreciated profession. And I want to take a moment to laud the work that middle school band directors do. They are important in the musical education of a lot of students (a lot of middle school band members are introduced to the instrument they will play on that first day and many will play that instrument for the rest of their lives).

And many of those students arrive with little or no musical training. That means the band director must match students to instrument (my older son really wanted to play the flute but the director took a look and said, “you have a cupid’s bow on your upper lip. It will split the airstream and give you lots of trouble on the flute. But I have just the instrument for you. We need an oboist and an excellent teacher lives right across the street from you”). Then, when my younger son arrived, the director discovered that he had “perfect pitch” and handed him a trombone. All of this means the director has to be proficient, at least to some extent, on all of the instruments in the band.

Plus, he has to convince a big bunch of teen-agers that, “**yes, you can play an instrument and march at the same time**”. And by the way, you’ll need to practice a lot at home. Then, he tells them that on Saturdays we’ll all get on the bus and go march in a band contest. **But it will be fun!**”

Convincing a bunch of teen-agers of this sounds like another daunting task to me. On top of all that, both middle school and high school band directors must have good people skills. When my son joined the middle school band, I noticed that the band director seemed to lose patience quickly and this worried me. I approached a coworker whose daughter had joined the band the year before (this coworker was very much a “take charge supervisor” and I thought he would be a good source of information).

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Middle School Band Directors (cont)

When I asked my coworker about the band director's temperament, he said, "Yes, he does get riled up pretty quickly and drummers are his special nemesis. Just the other day, he got irritated at one and threw an eraser but the drummer ducked and the eraser hit my daughter. Haw - Haw - Haw!"

I concluded that if someone like my coworker would laugh something like this off, that band director had a lot going for him! That proved to be the case because he gave both my sons a good start.

Getting back on subject, Bruce has done a lot of musical things in addition to his work with middle and high school bands. Most importantly, he is the trombonist with the Carolina Jazz Society Band. He is also the lead trombonist in Dick Goodwin's Big Band. Furthermore, he is the leader of "Dem Bones", a group of trombonists who play around the midlands (but they've cut back on their schedule and play mostly at churches now). Bruce also arranges the music and conducts at services at his church.

For those new to the club, Bruce was born in Georgia but grew up in Cheraw, SC. He studied music at the Universities of Tennessee and South Carolina where he earned degrees in Commercial Music and Music Education.

Bruce was also active as a performer, arranger, conductor and clinician for quite a few years. And he has performed with the SC Philharmonic Orchestra, the Columbia Lyric Opera, the Augusta Opera and with dozens of top performers including Nancy Wilson, Natalie Cole, Ray Charles, Lionel Hampton, Marian McPartland, Dizzy Gillespie, and Harry Connick, Jr. **That's quite a list.**

Our Special Guests Last Month

Lot's of compliments on last month's concert with Lauren Meccia on Baritone and Jim Mings on guitar. Lauren turned out to be a good singer to boot. Those of you in the Aiken area would be well advised to keep an eye out for her concerts. And for those in the midlands wanting to hear fine guitar work, you need look no further than Mings.

More on Saxes!

I got a lot of feedback on saxes at last month's concert; especially tenor sax players. Many noted that Midland's own, Chris Potter, won the young musicians prize that the Jazz Society offered one year before moving on to bigger and greater things. And the names of favorites came pouring in; Stan Getz, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Sonny Rollins, Ben Webster, Zoot Sims, Chu Berry, Art Pepper. And I remembered Rahsaan Roland Kirk who played two, sometimes three, saxes at the same time. It was a gimmick, but he was good at it.

Red Smith, Editor