

THE CAT'S MEOW



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Everybody Leads (but not at the same time)

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

2:30-5:00 pm, Sunday, **April 12, 2015**

When a band member is chosen as leader for a concert, that member normally chooses the songs, sets the tempo and decides whether to include the verse etc. But this time instead of having just one leader, Dick Goodwin asked each member to bring a list of his or her favorite songs. **But, they're not allowed to compare notes.** Doesn't that mean the same tune is likely to be called by more than once? Well yes. But this is jazz. I'm guessing you will be intrigued by differences on the second time or even the third time if there are duplicates. But this process also means there is a good chance we will get to hear songs that might not get played all that often. Isn't it fun to be associated with such great musicians! But that takes away a crutch I use. When I start a newsletter, my first question is, "what in the world can I write about this time?" Having a leader gives me something to focus on. But with everyone leading, that would turn out to be synopsis for each member. My solution; go back and do a bit about Dustin Retslaff who has filled in on bass several times but hasn't had a profile.

Dustin is another USC music grad. When we first met, I asked, if there wasn't a famous musician from the 20's named Retslaff. Turns out I was wrong about the name. I was thinking of Andy Razaf (actually, Andriamanantena Paul Razafinkarefo but he wisely shortened it to Andy Razaf). What's more, according to Wikipedia, Andy was the grand nephew of the queen of Gibraltar (who knew that Gibraltar had a queen). Wikipedia adds that his father was killed during the French invasion of Gibraltar and his pregnant mother escaped to the US at age 18 (but I note that Wikipedia is calling for citations to support claims in the article). Andy's first job as a teen-ager was elevator operator in the Tin Pan Alley office building. I don't know if this was a significant factor in his career but it's a good place for a budding lyricist to work. I used to tell my students that few people get to plan their careers. Careers happen more by chance than by plan. But, to succeed, they needed to have a goal and that meant having a plan. But it was important to keep their eyes open and to be flexible. I added that they would have opportunities they couldn't imagine at this time **but they had to recognize those opportunities and be prepared to take advantage of them when they arose.** I still think that's good advice. And looks like it worked for Andy. He collaborated with most of the well known musicians of that era. But his best known lyrics were used by Fats Waller. They include "Ain't Misbehavin", "Honeysuckle Rose", and the poignant "Why Am I So Black & Blue". Andy also worked with Eubie Blake, James P Johnson and most of the big names of that era.

THE CAROLINA JAZZ SOCIETY was founded in 1958 to enjoy Dixieland Jazz, one of America's original art forms.
Concerts are \$10 for non-members, \$5 for members, free for Patrons and young people under 18.

The North Carolina Jazz Festival

Jerry Bright and I attended the NC Jazz festival together this year. Jerry drove and he likes to savor the journey as much as the destination. That means we had a chance to wander along the Lumber River State Park. The park is billed as the longest state park in North Carolina (it encompasses much of the Lumber River's length). It was a very pleasant day with early spring flowers just beginning to appear and spring bird migration in full force. We also dropped by Lake Waccama State Park. Lake Waccama is the largest of the Carolina Bays and we learned that the lake has four endemic species of fish (species found no other place in the world). Yes, I know this is not about jazz but it was on our way to hear fine jazz and it let us indulge two interests.

The festival again featured a lot of excellent musicians, most on return engagements. I asked Jerry if he had to pick one to invite as a special guest for one of our concerts, which one would he choose? His answer; Adrian Cunningham, an Australian who plays clarinet, sax and flute. Adrian is an exciting player and it's really fun when he and Nicki Parrott, a fellow Aussie, team up on Australian songs.

Others of note include; Ed Polcer (who has been a special guest at several of our concerts some years ago). Ed is now living in New Orleans and was in fine form). Bria Skornberg, as usual, blew up a storm. And she is a pretty good singer to boot (hi praise coming from me). Herman Burney is a very facile bassist who always helps any group to swing.

We also learned that Mark Shane, the fine pianist, had a special reason for coming back. Mark met the lady who would become his wife in Wilmington. She is a native of Wilmington and they hit it off after meeting at one of the early Festivals.

Then there was Jonathan Russell who first played the Festival seven years ago at age 12. He is now a confident 19 year old who takes imaginative solos and is an impressive improviser. **But he plays violin.** Yes, there were fine records made by Stephane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt but I always thought it was Django's genius and outstanding guitar work that made their records a great success. No matter, Jonathan's talent shines through and he has a bright future in both the jazz and the classical world (but I still wish he had put all that talent and energy into a different instrument). I still think the violin is a lousy jazz instrument. But it would be a dull world if everyone thought alike.

On a different note, now that we have some freeboard on our finances, I would love to piggy-back on the festival once again to get one of the musicians as a special guest. That's how we afforded nationally known musicians like Ed Polcer, John Royen, Dan Levinson, Kenny Davern and many others in the long history of our club. You might say, "but the Carolina Jazz Society has really good musicians already". True, but a guest always brings special excitement and some new licks that makes it fun for everyone, members and musicians alike.

The NC festival often (but not always) ends on Saturday night with our concert being the next afternoon. That means we can coordinate transportation and that's the reason a relatively small club like ours can afford nationally known musicians.

And don't forget, because of Easter, our concert will be the second Sunday.

Red Smith, Editor