

THE CAT'S MEOW



PO BOX 50806 Columbia, South Carolina 29250 803-432-1504

Larry Conger and His Cornet to Lead the Crew

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

2:30-5:00 pm, Sunday, March 6, 2016

There's not much I can say that hasn't been said before. But we do have new members who are not privy to the long history of Larry Conger and the Carolina Jazz Society. It's worth taking a moment to recap.

Larry grew up in Northern California but obtained a formal musical degree from Ithaca College in New York. Members, who know only of Larry's jazz background, are always surprised to learn that Larry also played violin with the Greenville Symphony for a number of years.

But in my opinion, Larry's jazz chops were honed playing with Turk Murphy at Earthquake McGoon's in San Francisco; this was "Grad School". Then, when Larry moved to this area and wanted to form a band, he discovered the house band of the Carolina Jazz Society. They were quickly recruited and formed the nucleus of Larry's "Two Rivers Jazz Band". They played gigs all over the Southeast for a number of years.

Digging deeper, when you hear Larry's powerful cornet, you can hear influences that can be traced all the way back to Buddy Bolden, the famed New Orleans jazz man from the earliest days of jazz. Buddy played a powerful horn that, reportedly, could be heard all the way across Lake Pontchartrain. Sadly, Bolden's career was relatively short lived. He had a severe psychotic episode when he was 30 and spent the rest of his life in a mental institution.

But he had a big influence on Jazz in the short time that he was "King Buddy". In particular, Bolden influenced Bunk Johnson, the New Orleans horn player, who carried that influence to California where he played for many years. I've never been all the impressed with Bunk's playing (he had poor tone in my opinion) but Larry tells me that in his prime, Bunk was a fine jazz musician.

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.

North Carolina Jazz Festival

Jerry Bright and I went to the North Carolina Jazz Festival in Wilmington, NC again this year. It is not dixieland but there are a stellar bunch of musicians who play in various combinations over the three day festival. And in past years, the Carolina Jazz Society has been able to recruit top flight guest artists from there at fees we could afford (that's because because the Wilmington Festival ends on Saturday night and our concert is often the next afternoon). We could book them into Columbia without having to pay high travel costs. Plus, the Sunday after the Wilmington Festival is often an open slot in many performer's schedule.

Here's my very personal review:

Brea Skornberg; Brea is probably my favorite musician at the festival. The first time you see this young woman holding a trumpet, you might wonder, but when she starts blowing, you know you are hearing a really good jazz musician. Plus she is a very good vocalist (and there are not many I am willing to put in this category). I first saw and heard Brea at the Sacramento Jazz Festival when she was still in high school. She was part of an all girls jazz band out of British Columbia. It was clear, even then, that this was a major talent in the making. If you are not familiar with her playing, here's a link to a You Tube Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hP80H7aGg2s&list=RDhP80H7aGg2s#t=135>). This band also features Emily Asher, another of her high school band mates on trombone. At the festival, I got excited when I talked to Brea and discovered she would be playing in Hilton Head next spring. Alas, the timing is not right to piggy-back. But I personally would be very pleased if we could work something out to feature Brea along with our guys.

Quentin Baxter; Quentin, a native of Charleston and a fine drummer, received training both at USC and the College of Charleston. If you find yourself in the Charleston area, I suggest you find out where he is playing. I think you will like what you hear.

Adrian Cunningham; Adrian, an Aussie, is a versatile musician, who plays flute, pipes, sax, clarinet and a beer bottle. And it's really fun when he and fellow Aussie, **Nicki Parrott**, get together on some songs from "Down Under". I might add that Nicki is not only a fine bassist but a good singer also (wait a minute, I've just praised two singers, a world record for me).

Adrian is the new talent chairman for the Wilmington Festival having taken over that task from Ed Polcer. Long time members will remember that Ed was a special guest at our concerts several times in the 80's.

Nathan Russell; Nathan is all of 19 years old and a marvelous musician. What's more, he almost makes the violin into a jazz instrument. His talent was obvious early; **he was first invited to play at the Wilmington Festival as a 12 year old**. Nathan is at home in both the world of jazz and the classical repertoire. I understand he has now added composing and film work to his busy life. I predict a bright future for this young man in the broad world of entertainment.

Nate Najar; For guitar lovers, Nate plays on a guitar formerly owned by Charlie Byrd, the long time guitarist based in the DC area. Charlie, if you remember, helped popularize Brazilian Music.

Dion Tucker; Dion was playing at the festival for the first time this year. I was impressed with his playing. Obviously, others have been too because Wynton Marsalis added him to his "Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra" and other bands have recruited him for special tours.

Red Smith, Editor (farrensmith@bellsouth.net)