

THE CAT'S MEOW



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Larry Conger & His Cornet Return!

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

2:30-5:00 pm Sunday, March 5, 2017

Upon hearing Larry Conger for the first time, someone said, "Now that's Righteous Jazz". I'm not sure what he meant by the phrase. But if it meant listening to a cornet that would bring smiles to some of the great pioneers of Jazz, he was "on the money". Dick Goodwin says, "it's like going back to Grad School" or, "another lesson at Conger U".

Larry grew up with the sounds of the West Coast Revival. And what better way to really hone your craft than playing cornet with Turk Murphy. Turk was a fine musician and a great entertainer who was not content with repetitions of the old war horses. He knew and enjoyed the standards as well as anyone. But, he insisted on including some of the beautiful verses that seldom get heard and he maintained a large repertoire including some you were not likely to hear any place else. You get a taste of that when Larry takes the stand. We get to hear some real, classic jazz. Larry said that Turk always had a repertoire of about 400 songs, dropping some each year and adding new ones.



Larry brought all that knowledge with him when he landed in this area. But he took some surprising detours along the way. He attended Ithaca college in New York. Larry also played violin with the Greenville Symphony for several years.

Larry is a very popular guest and a good friend of the Jazz Society. What's more, he had a strong influence on our musicians .

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

Larry Conger (cont)

When Larry decided to form the "Two Rivers Jazz Band", he discovered that many of the best jazz men around, especially ones who could do justice to the early pioneer's of jazz, were members of the house band of the Carolina Jazz Society.

And Larry carries on the tradition of the early pioneers. That had to play without microphones and amplifiers back in the day. And Larry doesn't need them either. He can fill any room with sound with his cornet.

Wilmington NC Jazz Festival

For many years, it was the **NC Traditional Jazz Festival**. Traditional Jazz was always a strong part of the concerts. But it also offered performances by more modern jazz artists. They were all very good musicians and I enjoyed the mix.

The festival has a new Artistic Director and traditional jazz has been dropped from the name. We heard a lot of technically proficient musicians but not a lot of Dixieland.

But there were some bright spots. The new artistic director is Australian, Adrian Cunningham and he included another Aussie, Anita Thomas, who plays clarinet and a Native Australian Instrument called a Didgeridoo. It is formed by two relatively large pipes, one of which slides inside the other so that you can change the length. I'm not sure but I think the player must growl, hum and click into it. But she made the most interesting sounds come out of the instrument). That was really fun. Adrian plays sax and flute. He is a good flautist who starts out playing normally but then develops a counter rhythm by blowing across the flute directly into the mike periodically. I'm not sure how I would like a whole evening of that but for one song it is a bravura performance.

And Herman Burney is a spectacular bassist. Another musician, Nate Najar is a fine guitarist who plays the guitar once owned by Charlie Byrd. Charlie's widow attended the concert and sat at the table behind us. I enjoyed his relatively short set. All of the musicians included a show stopper in their set which delighted the audience.

If you attend there are many things to do in the area.

- The host hotel, Hilton Wilmington Riverside is on the Cape Fear River. The east side faces the Battleship North Carolina. Battleship tours are available.
- A fun coastal tour can be had by driving southeast out of Wilmington and taking the ferry. The ferry may be the least expensive boat tour you will ever have since it is government subsidized. You have already paid for it with your tax dollars so why not enjoy it.
- We also enjoyed the the Wayfarer Delicatessen's excellent bison burger just 6 blocks away from the host hotel. This is a lunch only special served on Thursday and Saturday.

All in all it is a good musical weekend that you may wish to include on your calendar for next year. Fair warning - this is a variety of jazz, not just traditional. See the schedule at the website - <http://ncjazzfestival.com>

Red Smith, Editor