

THE CAT'S MEOW



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Doug Graham Will Bring in the New Year

Heyward Street United Methodist Church

2501 Heyward Street

2:30-5:00 pm Sunday, January 8, 2023

Note: Doug will call the tunes next Sunday. I did not receive newsletter information for this concert I cannot comment on his agenda.

For some background on Doug I am sending a repeat of a September 2016 newsletter by Red Smith. (JB)

Doug Graham, the Early Years!

To get things started, I asked Doug if he had ever met Pete Fountain. Here is what Doug had to say: I met Pete Fountain a couple of times in the early 1960's. A gentleman that I knew in my home town in Mississippi was a great fan and friend of Pete's, and he had a son my age. Mr. Cox took me to a couple of concerts when Pete was in our area, and got me backstage after the concerts to talk to Pete. I remember clearly the first time I met him. He was in no hurry to get rid of me when he learned that I was a clarinetist. He was very kind, and I took the opportunity to ask questions about the equipment he used. I learned that he used a Pete Fountain model Leblanc clarinet, a Pete Fountain mouthpiece, and Pete Fountain reeds! I thought at the time that perhaps the day would come that I would share the same information with a young clarinetist about my Doug Graham clarinet, mouthpiece and reeds. That didn't happen, of course, but I am grateful that he took some time with me and encouraged me to continue my studies on the clarinet. His recording of "Just a Closer Walk With Me" inspired me to try to learn to improvise, but that really didn't happen until I met Dick Goodwin at the University of Texas in the late 1960's. Dick was just as kind and encouraging as Pete was, and somehow thought that I could learn to improvise. I took a class from him and learned some of the basics.

Fast forward a few years: I joined the faculty of the USC School of Music. Dick suggested that I learn to improvise on "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "All the Things You Are" and join his jazz group at times to play those tunes. I would play the two of them and pack up my horn. I began to sit in with the Jazz Society about that time, and met Tommy Wicks. I would watch him play a solo and get the chord changes from watching his fingerings on his solo, and I was able to do one of my own. I was basically copying what he did, but I had enough chops to sound pretty credible.

Editor's note: I was a member of the Jazz Society when Doug joined the band. I remember that first gig. It was obvious that Doug had great technique but was equally obvious that Doug was pretty new to Dixieland. But it was a real pleasure to watch his progress. Tommy would improvise a variation and Doug would listen intently. Then Doug would build on what Tommy had played – never the same thing, but always an interesting variation.

Doug Continues: "I began playing more often with Dick, and learned a few more tunes, and got more comfortable improvising. I think that I would never have ventured into jazz music if I had been discouraged by any of the great jazz players that I encountered. I had no confidence at all in my ability to improvise. I was trained as a classical musician, and I would not have ventured into the jazz world without the unconditional support of my jazz friends at the time. I still consider myself a classical musician at heart, but I'm finally comfortable, at the age of 70, having a ball!"

Red Smith, Editor