

**Can't be Sad when I hear Trad. . .
Jazz, that is.**

By George W. Earley

The last Sunday in February found the Seaside Convention Center vibrating as a hand-clapping, foot stomping crowd roared its appreciation of the just-concluded fifth annual Seaside. . . and all that Jazz festival.

Festival chairman Dick Pearson was as happy as the attendees. "We finished well in the black" he told me, adding that this year's success insured another fine festival in 1995.

If you haven't been attending, plan now -- it's always the last weekend in February and, food and lodging aside, costs around \$40 for a weekend all-events badge.

So what is Trad Jazz, I hear someone saying? Why man, that's Dixieland, Ragtime and the original old-time gospel blues. That's the music that came up out of New Orleans around the turn of this century, music that grew out of the black street bands of the 1890's, music that was played for weddings, funerals, in churches and at brothels. Street music, people music -- music that sang and soared and laughed and cried, that set feet a-dancin' and carried its listeners through the ups and downs of their lives.

It was black music then, energetic, imaginative and improvisational, but at some point as the new century got underway it caught the the imaginations of white musicians who, in time, made it largely their own.

If you really want its history, ask your library to find you a copy of *From Cakewalks to Concert Halls: An Illustrated History of African American Popular Music from 1895 to 1930* by Thomas L. Morgan & William Barlow (Elliot & Clark Publishing, Washington DC) or maybe get *In Search of Buddy Bolden* by Donald M. Marquis (Louisiana State University Press). If they hook you, you'll find ample bibliographic material to keep you reading until next year's Seaside jazz festival!

But getting back to this year's bash. It began the last Friday night, with a Grand Opening ceremony featuring brief sets by a number of festival bands. There were 10 bands in all, but if you recall the weather, you'll understand that some of them got in a tad late. . . airport problems in Portland, lost/misdirected luggage and a foggy drive out to the Coast. Oregonians are used to that but Californians aren't.

Not that they all came from California -- the Garden Avenue Seven is based in Largo, Florida, the Buck Creek Jazz Band hails from North Vancouver, British Columbia, while Portland's Stumptown Jazz represented Oregon.

The festival setup is simple -- you can literally stay in one spot and have all the bands come to you or you can trot around town a bit (or take the shuttle buses provided) and follow a favorite band or two to its various locations. Each band played about 8 times during the weekend.

The Convention Center has two halls -- the huge one downstairs (where the opening and closing ceremonies were held in addition to sets throughout the weekend) and a smaller upstairs room which, frankly, I preferred and largely lived in.

A third venue was provided by the Elks Lodge with the last two at the Ocean View hotel. With 15 minutes between sets (bands do need time to get from one place to another and set up and tear down), there was ample time to either change your own location or to fuel up at the Center's snack bar. Dinner breaks long enough to go to any of Seaside's eateries (or go souvenir shopping) were scheduled as well.

Souvenirs? Of course. One Convention Center room was given over to sales of period clothing -- fringed dresses, parasols (more about parasols in a minute), vests, hats -- plus T-shirts, sweat shirts and jewelry ranging from earrings and necklaces to tie tacks and pins. One novelty pin sold out almost immediately. Some bands mix in a bit of swing or country music and some Trad Jazzers don't welcome that, so "S.T.A.D." buttons (Shit, That Ain't Dixie) were in evidence.

Jan Scobey, widow of the late great Dixieland trumpeter Bob Scobey, was there with scores of tapes and CDs. (Send \$5 to Jan Scobey's Hot Jazz, 10755 Bachelor Valley Road, Witter Springs, Ca. 95493-9715 for a year's subscription to her jam-packed catalog of hundreds of CDs, tapes, videos and 'old fashioned' vinyl platters.)

And the bands have tapes and, in some cases, CDs of their music. (Stumptown even had a video of a Gospel service they did a year or so ago. More about Gospel services later on.) I am living proof that it is not at all difficult to quickly go broke amongst such a wealth of recordings!

Enough of that. What of the bands?

Well, if they weren't top notch, they wouldn't be there. But festival audiences do pick favorites and I'd say that this year it was the Blue Street Band, a high-spirited aggregation of young, highly skilled players who captured the hearts of the audience as well as the spirit of Trad Jazz.

As is often the case with Trad Jazz bands, Blue Street boasts musicians closely connected with the music scene outside the Dixie scene. Several of them teach in various school systems in California and I sure envy their pupils. There was nothing like that available to me when I took up the tuba many decades ago.

Nor was there anything like the Sacramento summer jazz camp which is training today's teenagers to carry Trad Jazz on into the 21st Century. Blue Street's vocalist, lovely 21-year-old Sherrri Colby, is not only a jazz camp graduate but has been singing with a band since she was 13.

The bands boast an eclectic collection of players

ranging from young chaps (Blue Street, for example) who've fallen in love with the music of their grandparents (or great-grandparents) to snowy-haired oldsters who have found little music they enjoy more since that from the decades between 1895-1935.

And there's audience participation as well. Not just cheering, hand clapping and foot stompin', but dancing and parading. I mentioned parasols. Well, you ain't seen nuthin' less you see a line of high-stepping ladies (and a few derby-hatted men), twirlin' fancy beaded, fringed parasols whilst struttin' to **South Ramparts Parade** or **When The Saints Go Marching In** or any one of a dozen other tunes that demand you do more than just sit and bounce up and down in your seat.

Having mentioned my own tuba playing, you can understand why I still retain a fondness for that weighty aggregation of shiny tubing and the growly sounds it can produce.

So I admit to having the hairs stir on the back of my neck while listening to such brass virtuosos as Bob Pettingill (Stumptown Jazz), Earl McKee (High Sierra Jazz Band), and Dave Lewis (Natural Gas Jazz Band) going far beyond the basic 'Oompah Oompah' I learned as a Junior High School tuba player. This is not to slight the other fine brass bassists, but those three really got to me.

McKee, I should note, doubles as vocalist for High Sierra, and his less-than-tender-hearted rendition of "I Had Someone Else Before I Had You and I'll Have Someone After You've Gone" displayed perhaps the ultimate in male cynicism towards the fairer sex.

But for all its raucous, hard-driving, toe-tapping beat, (and the sometimes not politically correct songs of yesteryear -- "I Had a Bimbo Down on the Bamboo Isles" will win no awards from feminists, though no one at Seaside seemed to mind) Trad Jazz is truly the folk music of a quieter, gentler time. . . a time that, for a weekend, is brought back by Dick Pearson and a hard-working aggregation of volunteers, all under the aegis of the Seaside Chamber of Commerce.

Beer flows --- but there are no noisy drunks. The parking lot overflows, but drivers courteously yield to one another with smiles and friendly waves. And on the dance floor, couples whose energy belies their years deftly maneuver around other equally energetic dancers without anyone trying to slam dunk anyone else. I couldn't help thinking that the world would be a better place if everyone could only partake of the feelings that Trad Jazz seems to imbue in its listeners.

And that feeling was reinforced on Sunday, when the traditional Gospel Service is held. Open free to the general public as well as to Festival attendees, this year's service was a double one. Stumptown Jazz held forth at the main Convention center hall while Blue Street was at a local church. The program called for a mix of gospel songs and tunes plus some testimony about the two organizations to whom the freewill offerings went. Stumptown attendees contributed over \$1100 to the Columbia-Pacific Head Start program while Blue Street listeners donated nearly \$1700 to the Victory Over Child Abuse program.

Hopefully some of you out there may now have an itch to participate in a Trad Jazz festival. . . there are a host of them up and down the Pacific Coast almost year round. But how to find them? Simple. Join the Lighthouse Jazz Society (1545 N. Roosevelt, Seaside 97138) and they'll introduce you to the whole Trad Jazz scene. For example: The Rose City Classic Festival of Jazz (write them at 13155 SW Foothill Drive, Portland 97225) will be at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland over Labor Day Weekend while Lighthouse is sponsoring the 12th Annual Oregon Dixieland Jubilee in Seaside beginning Sept 30th. And that barely scratches the surface of what's available.

You can't be sad when you're hearing trad. . . go thou and listen!

Freelance writer George W. Earley lives in a secluded hideaway in the upper Hood River Valley with his wife Margo, his big Malamute Thunder and "more jazz CDs than Margo cares to count."



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