



Black History Month



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Committed to Cultural Diversity



Michael Henniger presents 'We Had Jazz.'



PHOTO BY MICHAEL LEIGHTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Gerald Patrick, 61, checks out the historical 'We Had Jazz' exhibit for Black History Month in the public atrium at Legacy Emanuel Hospital in inner north Portland. As a resident of Gresham who grew up in the Albina neighborhood where Williams Avenue was the epicenter of a vibrant black community and jazz and nightclub scene before it was displaced by urban renewal, Patrick said he can relate to his community's lost connections to the past.

Documenting the city's historic black culture

The golden age of Portland jazz, black culture and entrepreneurship came to an end with Urban Renewal and the construction of the I-5 freeway. The heart of Williams Avenue's black-owned nightlife, judged blighted by city leaders and developers was taken through eminent domain, leveled and entirely replaced by the I-5 freeway and Veterans Memorial Coliseum. By

We Had Jazz

1958, little remained of this rich cultural heritage.

For Black History Month, "We Had Jazz," a photo exhibit showcasing the leading black jazz musicians of the 1940s and 50s performing in historic Portland venues is making an encore presentation, free and open to the public, on display all month long in the atrium at Legacy Emanuel Hospital in north Portland.

The photo collection is from the

estate of Carl Henniger, a Portland photographer who left a collection of 385 images believed to be the most complete photo record of Portland's jazz history known. More photos from the collection are also on display during February at the Newmark Theater, downtown as part of the 2020 PDX Jazz Festival.

The historic collection of photos was rediscovered by Carl's son Michael after resting for 60 years in a

drawer in the garage of his late father's home. He scanned and printed the original negatives and several were included in a history of the era in the 2005 book "Jazz Town" by Robert Dietsche and for promoting the 2016 Oregon Public Broadcasting documentary "Jazz Town."

Henniger created "We Had Jazz," with 30 of the best photographs from his father's collection and first shared them in a special

showing last fall at Portland City Hall supported by a grant from the Regional Arts and Cultural Council.

Jazz in Portland dates back to the 1920s and early 30s prohibition era when black railroad workers would bring alcohol to the city via distant locations and it would be consumed at Albina area night spots. Live music and dancing was an integral part of the club and bar scene of the day.

But jazz blossomed in the years around World War II due to the influx of thousands of new black families. Income from jobs in the Kaiser Shipyards stimulated the growth and expansion of black-owned and operated night spots.

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