

Albina Jazz Festival Pays Tribute to Portland's Music History

Veteran musicians, newcomers play in historic building on N. Broadway

By Christen McCurdy
Of The Skanner News

Stephen Hanks' father, Zane, moved to Oregon in 1952. He was in the Navy and was stationed in Astoria. But on the weekends he would come to Portland and visit the jazz clubs.

In the 1940s and 1950s Portland's North Williams Avenue was known as "Jumptown" or "Black Broadway." The neighborhood was dotted with jazz

clubs that attracted the hottest jazz performers from all over the country, and acted as an incubator for local talent.

Due to his parents' love of music — Hanks' mother was also a jazz fan, and his parents owned a club in downtown Portland in the 1970s and 1980s called the Jazz Nest. Hanks grew up listening to jazz and learning about it. He admits, though, that he was late in connecting with the music itself.

"I didn't really get into jazz too much until I heard the jazz fusion. When I

heard Herbie Hancock and the Head Hunters and George Benson — that's what really made me get interested in jazz," Hanks said.

Hanks also runs the Portland Pioneers of Color Walking Tours, which takes regular walking tours through Albina and downtown Portland. About a year ago, he had the idea to combine his love of music and his interest in history, and start a jazz festival that would pay tribute to jazz clubs in Albina.

The Albina Jazz Festival takes place

“The jazz that came in during the World War II era, it was what we call now modern jazz. At that time it was called bop, or bebop, and it was just the hottest thing going on. And so that's what came out of Albina

clubs that attracted the hottest jazz performers from all over the country, and acted as an incubator for local talent.

Due to his parents' love of music — Hanks' mother was also a jazz fan, and his parents owned a club in downtown Portland in the 1970s and 1980s called the Jazz Nest. Hanks grew up listening to jazz and learning about it. He admits, though, that he was late in connecting with the music itself.

"I didn't really get into jazz too much until I heard the jazz fusion. When I

this Saturday and Sunday at the Stingray Café in the Left Bank Building on North Broadway — a venue Hanks specifically chose because of its connection to Portland Jazz History.

Jump Town

In 1945 the building now known as the Left Bank Building housed the Dude Ranch, which was open for less than a year, but which historians consider the birthplace of the Portland jazz scene.

"There never was and there never will be anything quite like the Dude

Brooks

cont'd from pg 6

Brooks' literary achievements have made her an enduring figure in American culture—Black and White. While much has been said about her work, her hard life growing up in segregated Chicago has made her success all the more extraordinary.

Some 36 years after capturing the Pulitzer, Brooks gave a sit-down interview in 1986 with the Library of Congress. The interview came as Brooks served as the 29th Consultant in Poetry for the world's largest library. Alan Jabbour, the director of the Library of Congress' American Folklore division, and E. Ethelbert Miller, poet and director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University, interviewed her. The interview is posted on YouTube.

During the interview, Brooks was asked how she learned that she had won the Pulitzer Prize. She said: "I was in a house at 9134 S. Wentworth and the lights were out. We hadn't paid the electric bill so there was no electricity and it was dusk. It was dark in the house. My son [Henry Blakely Jr.] was nine at the time. Jack Starr, a reporter from the Chicago Sun-Times called. He said 'do you know that



Poet Gwendolyn Brooks lived in Chicago's Ivy Park Homes, formerly known as the Princeton Park housing project, when she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1950.

you have won the Pulitzer Prize?' I said 'no' and screamed over the telephone. I couldn't believe it. So, he said well, it was true and it would be announced the next day. The next day, report-

we would go out to the movies to celebrate. I don't know what movie it was, before you ask."

Before moving to Princeton Park Homes, hard times and financial challenges forced

“My son and I danced around in the dusk and decided we would go out to the movies to celebrate

ers came, photographers came with cameras and I was absolutely petrified. I wasn't going to say anything about the electricity. Well, when they tried to plug their cameras in—nothing was going to happen."

Brooks continued: "Well, miraculously, somebody had turned the electricity back on that fast. I never knew exactly what happened. So my son and I danced around in the dusk and decided

Brooks and her husband to move about six times on the South Side. Brooks used the profits of a sale of a house in Kalamazoo, Michigan to buy the house at 7428 S. Evans in the Chicago's Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood. According to author George Kent's 1990 book, "A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks," she lived in that house from 1953 to 1994. Today, the home is a Chicago landmark.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LEFT BANK PROJECT

This weekend's Albina Jazz Festival, which celebrates the history of jazz in Portland, will take place in the Stingray Café on N. Broadway, which in 1945 housed the Dude Ranch, one of the city's first jazz venues. Pictured here is Louis Armstrong with Dude Ranch owners Pat Patterson and Sherman Pickett.

Ranch," writes historian Robert Dietz in the 2005 book, "Jump Town: the Golden Years of Portland Jazz, 1942-1957" "It was the Cotton Club, the Apollo Theater, Las Vegas, the Wild West rolled into one. It was the shooting star in the history of Portland jazz, a meteor bursting with an array of the best Black and Tan entertainment this town has ever seen: strippers, then called shake dancers, ventriloquists, comics, jugglers, torch singers, world-renowned tap dancers like Teddy Hale, and of course the very best of jazz."

"The jazz that came in during the

World War II era, it was what we call now modern jazz," Hanks said. "At that time it was called bop, or bebop, and it was just the hottest thing going on. And so that's what came out of Albina."

All the neighborhood's other night clubs were casualties of a series of urban renewal projects that also destroyed hundreds of homes and the rest of Albina's business district, which thrived well into the 1970s.

In addition to boasting several thriving venues, the Albina jazz scene was

See JAZZ on page 8

Your new ticket to ride.



- ✓ Tap and go
- ✓ Save as you ride
- ✓ Reload almost anywhere



myhopcard.com