



THE GREAT ESCAPE!*

****“Anything that is good jazz is a great escape. When you’re involved in playing or listening to great jazz, no one can get to you.” -Woody Herman**

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Buddy Hughes: One Night on the Stand with Thornhill

By Bob Knack

While rummaging through my record room recently, I came across a dusty cardboard box containing a morsel of real treasure. It was an October 21, 1946 copy of Downbeat Magazine, with the headline, “Claude Thornhill, Band of the Year”. The article highly praised the Thornhill band reviewed “live” at the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City.

It saved the highest accolades for the guy singer, Buddy Hughes, saying he had “the freshest, best voice to be heard with a band”. I asked my friend and Glen Ellyn, Illinois resident, Buddy to reminisce about this night and his time with the CT band, and, as always, he brought the era back to mind with his stories as if it were yesterday.



Buddy Hughes

Photo courtesy of Perry Huntoon

“The Hotel Pennsylvania was the first major stop in the unveiling of the new post World War II Claude Thornhill Orchestra,” says Buddy. “My having been overseas in the service for three years (1942-1945) and having been in the service since 1941, I was not familiar with the fact that the original Thornhill band had been disbanded and Claude had also gone into the service. I heard an occasional record of Thornhill while I traveled with a Minnesota territory band called Bennett-Greten, but the airwaves were full of great bands broadcasting nightly and we enjoyed them all so much.”

Buddy says the 1946 Thornhill band was organized by Claude, his manager Leonard Vannerson (Martha Tilton’s husband), and pre-war arrangers Gil Evans and Bill Borden. They were in the process of determining which arrangements from the earlier band would be kept in the book and what new arrangements might be used. “They spent months auditioning and hiring musicians and singers, so this was expected to be

the most exciting band ever.” In the review, DB magazine reported that Vannerson had recently left the band leaving Thornhill without a personal manager or press agent making it difficult for the band to compete for bookings.

“After playing some smaller eastern ballrooms and theatres,” Buddy continues, “the appearance at the Pennsylvania was a big event for the band, and had the attention of show business and band personalities who packed the place for the big night”. “I was introduced by my manager to Mildred Bailey, Paula Kelly and the Modernaires, Les Brown (with his arranging pad in hand), singer Buddy Clark and many other notables. The band was well received by them.”

“Paula Kelly, when we were introduced at the Modernaires table, rose, clasped my hand, and said, ‘Oh, my favorite singer’. I’ll never forget that and Buddy Clark complimented me on my “Under the Willow Tree” recording. This was one of my favorite Thornhill records along with “If You Were the Only Girl”, “It’s a Pity to Say Goodnight, and “This Time”. Les Brown told me if he could have the classy smoothness of Claude’s with the swing style of his own, he’d be happy.”

“As a side note, Claude’s clarinet player, Bob Walters, one of those self-styled funny characters, who did things for his own amusement, was a ‘no show’ that night on the band stand as we all sat waiting for Claude’s downbeat. I then saw Bob across the room in a doorway and wondered why he didn’t come on the stand. He suddenly came running across the dance floor, deliberately tripped himself, fell flat and his face sliding head first into the raised bandstand. He got up holding his Roman nose, got on the stand, picked up his instrument and played exactly on cue as if nothing had happened. He later entertained us from time to time with his antics. He was a great clarinet *and* piano player.”

The Claude Thornhill band of that era had a configuration of four trumpets, four trombones, six reeds, rhythm section, and even, on occasion, French horns and tuba along with vocals. The band featured lush ballads and Thornhill’s own brand of easy-going be-bop.

Downbeat raved about the entire Thornhill reed section saying it was “stuffed with talent”. It included Ted Goddard, who reminded DB of Benny Carter. He passed through the bands of Glenn Miller, Red Norvo, Boyd Raeburn and Hal McIntyre. “Claude’s reed section was always great,” says Buddy, “I always enjoyed Ted Goddard’s alto, but he reminded me more of Willie Smith. The lead alto man, Jack Ferrier, had been with Glenn Miller and had beautiful tone. Baritone saxist Chet Pardee was great. The tenors (Joe Aglora and (Jack) Delong were perfect for the band keeping in mind what Claude wanted at all times. “The personnel changed periodically,” continues Buddy, “maybe because of financial reasons or because perhaps the musicians got bored

with Claude's laid-back style."

DB liked the band's guitarist, Barry Gailbraith, and bassist, Iggy Shevack, but felt drummer Irv Cotler "plays well but needs a little more force on up-tempos". He had come from the bands of Tommy Dorsey, Charlie Spivak and Larry Clinton. Shevack, they said did not stay enough with the basic beat of the band. "I disagree with Downbeats assessment of the drummer", counters Buddy, "Irv went on, as you know, to great acclaim as Frank Sinatra's personal drummer and all his swinging recordings. I can see where he might have been reticent to play more forcefully with Claude as the band was a smooth, low-key unit but to me he gave the band a bright lift. Iggy Shevack, the bassist, did seem totally wrong for the style. A powerful, up player but he seemed to be filling in between the arrangers scoring."

Claude Thornhill was "sitting pretty" with arrangers Evans and Borden according to the review. "I liked Bill Borden, who arranged most of the vocals I sang," says Buddy. "He was a calm, low key person. I didn't know anything about good or bad arranging because I liked most everyone's band and didn't try to figure out what or why I liked what I heard. It was easy to sing anything they wrote. And in that era, the bands played with dynamics and feeling for the vocalist, supporting, not covering or competing volume wise. "I had no choice in selecting record material, so I learned to like the tunes better after they had been released and after we'd performed them often on the bandstand. I liked moderate tempos, but would rather do the ballads".

"Gil Evans was phenomenal. He could take the simplest melody and create something swinging and interesting. Claude arranged most of the pretty piano pieces you can identify like 'Snowfall', 'Autumn Nocturne,' 'Sleepy Serenade' and all the classical adaptations. "He did only one of mine...'Twilight Song'.

As mentioned, the article raves about Buddy's talents. "His intonation...is light, unaffected, and completely original", gushes Downbeat, "It needs no critical ear to decide...Hughes will be a much sought after man". "They were not as kind to the bands gal singer, Jeanne Shirley. "Miss Shirley, while nice looking, impressed one less, she was hard to hear and understand and seemed to lack vocal appeal." " She was originally from the Harry Cool band," offers Buddy, "She was very pretty, sweet, but maybe lacked the cutting edge the band critics and others felt was necessary...she was on the band a very short time."

"The girl singers before Jeanne were as follows: Beverly Byrne, a pretty good singer of some renown with Krupa and Randy Brooks. Next, we had Betty Bennett who was married to Iggy Shevack. She was more of a jazz singer and left when Ziggy did for the West Coast. I've never heard of either since."

"Then there was Fran Warren; she came over to Claude at the Hotel Pennsylvania, directly from the fun-loving Charlie Barnet band. She told me she had to be on her best behavior coming to the nice and dignified Thornhill band. She immediately recorded "A Sunday Kind of Love" and you know how that went. She stayed with the band after I left and recorded more. The next time I saw her she was in Finian's Rainbow on Broadway."

"I, as others associated with him, haven't a handle on Claude Thornhill", reflects Buddy, "many have written about him, such as his friend Artie Shaw and others". One thing I'm sure, he had a sound and style for his band embedded, any arrangement that didn't blend with his wants was politely but firmly rejected. I never heard him raise his voice, but he got respect from his band. To me he was gentle, kind, vague,

distant, brilliant, simplistic, yet in control...aloof maybe, but not full of ego. In all, a great guy to work with and for".

After leaving Thornhill around May of 1947, Buddy stayed in N.Y. (Staten Island) with his sisters, brother, and wife, Monie, until a call came from Joe Dale, Gene Krupa's manager. A vocalist was needed immediately at Frank Daily's Meadowbrook in New Jersey. Buddy took the job and in a week or so was on his way, via one-nighters to The Hollywood Palladium and other coast ballrooms. He also had an earlier successful run with Jimmy Dorsey.

Occasionally still playing bass and singing on local gigs, Buddy looks back on his Thornhill days with mixed feelings. "I was extremely lucky to have the opportunity to sing with a one-of-a-kind band. I would have preferred to have fate put Claude's band and me a few years sooner, during the time when people were basking in and dancing to the other great sounds of B.G., T.D., J.D. and Glenn Miller and there might have been room for our talents. I'm grateful for the interest people are showing in the sound and history of that period. I'm enjoying the feeling I get from having been a part of it all and hard to believe that I had the good fortune. I wish I were younger so I could live it for a longer time."

Mini Quiz

What New Orleans composer wrote hit records for such diverse artists as Al Hirt, Herb Alpert's Tijuana Brass, The Rolling Stones, Glen Campbell and Ernie K-Doe to name a few. Answer later in issue...

Swing band...

FOR RENT



Ted Butterman's Neo-Passé Quintette : Ronnie Baron, Ted, Russ Phillips, Scott Black and Dave Elias

Specializing in swing music of the 30s and 40s, ala Benny Goodman the group is versatile and their repertoire reaches back to the 20s and onward to the 50s, 60s, and some later, excluding rock.

The band performs at any kind of function limited only by your imagination. This includes picnics, Bar-B-Qs, pool parties, Mardi Gras, conventions and wedding receptions. The band consists of piano, bass, drums, rhythm guitar and features a variety of horn players on different occasions including reed players, trumpets, trombones, vibes, and other instrumentalists from time to time. Expect guest artists to sit in occasionally!

[Check out the Ted's song list here! They know 'em all!](#)

To book the Neo-Passé contact Ted at
TBBands@dixieswing.com

So Long, Pennsylvania 6-5000?

It looks like the next gig for the Hotel Pennsylvania, mentioned in our earlier story on vocalist Buddy Hughes, will be a date with the wrecking ball.

Current owner, Vornado Realty Trust, intends to demolish the 22-story hotel and replace it with a 2.5 million-square foot office tower.

The famous venue was designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White, who also designed the Pennsylvania Railroad Station and the Waldorf Astoria, and opened its doors in 1919. It was considered the largest hotel in the world until 1927 boasting 2,200 bathrooms, 3,537 beds and the world's first high-rise elevator system.

The hotel went through many name changes during its lifetime becoming the Statler Hilton in 1954, the New York Statler in 1979, and the New York Penta in 1983 before returning to the Hotel Pennsylvania by the 1990's. In 2002, the hotel officially registered "World's Most Popular Hotel" as its trademark after serving over 27 million guests.

The legendary Café Rouge Ballroom hosted many of the big bands during the era-Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Fred Waring, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Claude Thornhill and Duke Ellington- who broadcast 'live' remotes from the Ballroom.

Browser Paul McCurnin recently passed along a recording to me from New Year's Eve 1945 over the Armed Forces Radio Network with remotes from various venues many of them long gone, including Les Brown from the Café Rouge'.

The hotel is perhaps best known for having the longest-running telephone number made famous by the Glenn Miller Orchestra's 1938 recording "Pennsylvania 6-5000". Today, you can download the tune to use as a ring tone on your cell phone.

--Bob Knack



New Year's Eve...1939

Here are the top ten things to do on New Years Eve in New York City in '39 and what it would cost:

- 1.) Biltmore Hotel—MU 9-7920 \$7.50
Horace Heidt & his Orchestra
- 2.) Commodore Hotel—MU 6-6000 \$7.50
Sammy Kaye & his Orchestra
- 3.) Edison Hotel—CI 6-5000 \$6.00
Les Brown & his Collegiate Duke Blue Devils
- 4.) Cotton Club—CI 6-5000 \$6.00
Cab Calloway & his Sepia Review
- 5.) Paradise Restaurant—CI 7-1080 \$5.00
Russ Morgan & his Orchestra
- 6.) New Yorker—ME 3-1000 \$10.00
Tommy Dorsey, Edythe Wright, Jack Leonard and a complete floor show.
- 7.) Lincoln Hotel—CI 6-4500 \$7.50
Back Bay Shuffles with Art Shaw
- 8.) Roosevelt Grill—MU 6-9200 \$8.00
Guy Lombardo's Music
- 9.) Waldorf-Astoria Hotel—EL 5-3000 Empire Room \$10.00
Benny Goodman in the Cert Room. Only \$5.00 for Emil Coleman in the lounge.
- 10.) Hotel Pennsylvania PE 6-5000. Madhattan Room \$10.00
Kay Kyser & his Musical Klass & Dance.

Source: Metronome Magazine

Warren Ketter's Corner

My Blind Date

By Warren Ketter

During my teen years at Chicago's Lake View High School, the favorite dance bands for school-sponsored dances were the Campus Oyls, Stan Russell, Eddie Woodward and Gay Claridge.

The Gay Claridge band played the Hal Kemp style and Kemp was and still is my favorite of the sweet bands. As a member of my high school prom committee, my vote to hire the Claridge Band was the only one and the prom clique vote went to Eddy Allyn.

I must digress from my story to acknowledge that you may not be aware of any of the bands mentioned. The same also holds true with some of the Browser mail we've received, as to why we don't write something about Danny Devine and his Des Moines Devils or Mabel Marvel and her Melody Makers. The answer lies in the fact that many of us are wild about local groups, but they may not be of interest to the rest of the readers.

Now back to the story. Because of my attendance at many dances, sometimes just to listen, I developed a friendship with Gay Claridge. My first job was with E.H. Scott radio and Gay purchased a few pieces of speaker equipment from us.

At this time, the Claridge band was quite popular and was playing many affairs. One steady gig was Sunday nights at Chicago's Medinah Hotel on Michigan Avenue. One Sunday night during a band break, Gay asked me if I would be interested in going out on a double date. He said my date was currently rooming with his girlfriend. Of course, I was interested and told him to set the date. The date was made for the following week.

This get-together sounded great to me. I got a haircut and had my best suit pressed. I was ready to go.

In the middle of the week, as the date was set to take place, Gay called me and said the date would have to be cancelled. I became quite shook up at this turn of events and asked what happened. Gay replied that my supposed date just got hired by Benny Goodman as a vocalist with his band. Who was it? Peggy Lee!

Several years later, while I was working for Dave Garroway, Peggy became an acquaintance but I never mentioned the potential dream date of many years back.

Incidentally, the Claridge band played at the Chez Patee, one of Chicago's top nightspots as well as the top hotels in New York City.

Warren's Tid-Bits

George Brunis turned the song, "You're Some Pretty Baby" into "You're Some Ugly Child"...Louis Armstrong gave up all rights to his composition "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate" for fifty dollars when he sold it to a publishing company...Trumpet man and arranger Billy May began his musical career playing Tuba in his high school band...Johnny Mercer got his first big break when he sang in and won a Paul Whiteman talent contest in New York.

Ronnie Kole to be Honored

New Orleans Jazz piano great, Ronnie Kole, will be honored with his own statue in that city's Music Legend's Park next April.

Kole will be the fifth jazzperson so honored with Al Hirt, Pete Fountain, Fats Domino and Chris Owens preceding him. "Needless to say, that is going to be one of the most important days of my career, says Kole, about the Friday, April 11th, 2008 unveiling. Following a press conference and the unveiling, there will be a parade on Bourbon Street to Jackson Square where Kole will kick off the 25th annual French Quarter Festival. The fest features three days of local musicians on 17 stages.

A Story From a Guy on Les Brown's Band...

Jack Redmond was the lead chair trombonist for the Bill Holman Big Band and Steve Huffsteter Band. He also worked with: Les Brown, Jerry Gray, Les Elgart, Stan Kenton, Charlie Barnet, Tex Beneke, Claus Ogerman, Ray Conniff, Sy Zentner and Buddy Childers bands...not a bad résumé. He also recorded with and worked in television and motion pictures with Barbra Streisand, Nancy Sinatra, Andy Williams, Lou Rawls, Celine Dion, Natalie Cole, Dean Martin, B.B. King, Ray Charles, Neil Diamond, The Mills Brothers, Manhattan Transfer, The Beach Boys, and many more over the years he has been playing professionally. Jack worked on the Bob Hope TV Specials for thirty years, traveling to Vietnam and around the world with him.

"I was on the Bob Hope Christmas tours of Vietnam as a member of the Les Brown Band from 1967 thru 1972, recalls Redmond, "and I can honestly say that, of all the gigs I've played, including presidential inaugurations, the White House, Carnegie Hall, motion pictures, television, etc. in my 49 years as a Hollywood musician, the ones which I look back on with the most pride are those tours."

"We were paid very well, of course, but most of us would have gone for nothing. Being there with you guys at places like Long Binh, Danang, Chu Lai, Camp Eagle, Pleiku and all those other places which are now just an ancient memory or a bad dream to most of you, was the greatest. No other audience has ever been as wonderful to play for since then. Those of us who did those trips still talk about them when we see each other. Even though my four years in the Air Force were during the Korean War, I consider Vietnam to be "my war."

"I will never forget the earth shaking cheer that would go up when Bob was introduced, or watching your faces when Ann-Margret or Raquel Welch or the Gold-Diggers were on stage, or trying to play "Silent Night," our final number, with tears streaming down our faces."

"God bless every one of you. And God bless all those who live on only as names on that sacred wall in Washington."

Sources: www.maynardferguson.com & www.trombonesonline.com



The Snail-Mail Bag...



Editors note: In our article "There Was Plenty Of Action Back In The Day" in the last issue we alluded to the Normandy Club next door to the Aragon Ballroom in Chicago. An edited version previously appeared in The Illiana Club Newsletter. The band there was the Gold Coast Dixielanders We listed the personnel as Jim Clark, Marty Nichols, Chuck Hedges, Dave Remington, and Howie Agster. It prompted this response:

Hi Bob,

The Dixieland Group at the Normandy...was with Hedges, Remington, Clark, Nichols and myself on drums, not Agster. That's where I met Hedges and 30 years later I joined Chuck Hedge's Swingtet playing vibes at Andy's Jazz Club where we played every Monday for twenty years.

Thanks,

Duane Thamm Villa Park, Ill. **A Snail Mail**

Two-fer...



Dear Mr. Knack,

The first thing I want to say is that I really enjoy "The Great Escape". I don't have a computer but my daughter has one and makes me a copy. Anyway, talk about a small world. When my wife and I used to go to church in Glen Ellyn, (Ill.) my wife would say "Boy, that Buddy Hughes sure has a nice singing voice." Later we found out it was THE Buddy Hughes who sang with Thornhill.

Sincerely,
Andy Games
Hixon, Tn.

Dear Mr. Knack,

Again, I want to thank you for the new "Great Escape". Enjoyed the article on [favorite record stores](#) ...back in 1946-47, we would go to the Emerald Record Store on the corner of North, Damen & Milwaukee Avenues (Chicago) and take the 78's into the booth and listen to the records. Those were the days.

Sincerely,
Andy Games
Hixon, Tn.

Chicago's Original Hits Station
featuring **THE BROWSERS** from Trivia Tower

WJGG
AM 1530

Mike Baker
and the **Forgotten 45s**

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Don't forget Mike's 13th annual "Home Town Christmas" from Sign on to Sign off on Christmas day!

The Browsers, experts in the big band era, will be on winter hiatus until March of 2008. www.wjggam1530.com

Big band music fans will be pleased to know "The Browsers" are returning. Bob Knack will host vignettes celebrating the bygone genre on west suburban WJGG-AM (1530). Knack will serve up trivia questions and big band tunes once every hour during Mike Baker's music show...

-From Robert Feder
Chicago Sun-Times, May 25, 2007

Editors note: Thanks for the plug, Robert! It was a great summer.

In response to your many requests: The Browsers theme song "Browsin'" is available at www.ronniekole.com

That Big Band Singer's Column

By Walt Andrus



I don't remember the year, but one Thanksgiving we were on the road with Buddy and The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra between gigs and couldn't get home for Thanksgiving. We were stuck somewhere in the Midwest at a cheap motel. Thanksgiving dinner was a turkey sandwich at the Dairy Queen about 1/4 mile walk.

On another Thanksgiving, we happened to be on a break. I was home having our family dinner. Buddy Morrow called to wish us a happy holiday and said "By the way...the New Year's Eve gig in San Diego is cancelled". I said "Well, OK...Surely, you had a deposit...so send me SOMETHING...there's no way I can book myself for New Year's this late in the year". He said no. I didn't want to go pounding around for a local gig so I called Dick Johnson (leading the Artie Shaw Orchestra) and asked, "Do you have a New Year's gig?" He said they were at The Sands in Atlantic City. I volunteered to work for NOTHING and just got a comp room. His band bus met me on I-95 way down from Boston and I brought my arrangements and did the gig with no rehearsal in the Copa Room. It was fun and we all had a happy new year! The sound/tech staff was impressed and told me that "The Old Man" (Sinatra) would be back in March and offered me a backstage pass.

We happened to be on break from the road with The TDO when Frank Sinatra was appearing so I put on my best suit and drove 3 1/2 hours to Atlantic City to see the rehearsal and show. I had my pass around my neck. Frank Junior was conducting the rehearsal. I got a tap on the shoulder from some security guy. "Who are you?" I introduced myself, "Hi, I'm Walt Andrus; I sang here New Year's Eve with The Artie Shaw Orchestra and was invited by the tech staff. I also sing with The Tommy Dorsey Orchestra", other mutual acquaintances, etc. etc.

I was escorted out of the rehearsal and had to surrender my backstage pass. Frank Sr. did not come down for the rehearsals at this point anyway.

I snuck in, sat in the sound booth with the tech guys, and watched the show. I was in tears. Frank was not able to remember/read lyrics (despite the Teleprompters) and he kept repeating jokes during the show.

That's the LAST TIME I went to see Frank Sinatra.

The first time was 1981 at a sold out Hartford Civic Center with Pat Henry opening when I was 17. I saw him at Carnegie Hall with Peter Duchin's orchestra with Pete Barbutti opening, New Haven Coliseum with Buddy Rich and Tom Dreesen, the 70th birthday concert at The Meadowlands, NJ, Resorts International, in Atlantic City with Charlie Callas and Nancy Jr. opening in '82.

In 1983 I was introduced to trombonist Sonny Costanzo (who was a MARVELOUS player and worked with Woody Herman, Clark Terry's Big Band and many others) via my friend Sal Libero (Libro) who owned a music store in New Haven (Goldie & Libro) and played lead alto with Les Brown, Tex Beneke, Tommy & Jimmy Dorsey as well as many studio recordings. I was still playing sax at the time, just out of high school. I had just started singing since I had gotten a few arrangements for big band. Sal and some other friends

introduced me to Sonny. I sang with him (lugging my OWN Sound System and my own arrangements) and many other local groups for 5 years and did several recordings and some work with The Pied Pipers, before getting the call from Buddy Morrow to go on the road in 1988 and recording with The Buddy Morrow Orchestra...

We're happy to announce that Walt will be a regular contributor to "The Great Escape" Check out his web site at www.thebigbandsinger.com

Big Band Quiz, Browsers Style!

Submitted by Joe Carlton

1. Band leaders and singers often had nicknames, such as Benny Goodman, The King of Swing. Who were the following?
A. The Velvet Fog **B.** The Divine One **C.** The Heigh-di-ho Man **D.** The First Lady of Song **E.** Pops **F.** Banjo Eyes **G.** Lady Day
2. How many songs can you name that have a given name as the last word in the song's title?
3. In the movie, "Wizard of Oz", who sang the song "If I Only Had A Brain"?
4. Clint Eastwood directed a movie and the late Johnny Hartman's voice was heard on four songs in this movie. What was the movie?
5. Ronnie Kemper sang with the Dick Jurgens Orchestra. What was his biggest hit?
6. Buddy Rich played on the Harry James recording of "Barn 12", and he used a different name as he was under contract with another recording company. What name did he use?
7. After WWII, Johnny Desmond made the recording of "Together". Who had the biggest selling record of this song?
8. Benny Goodman had many famous trumpet players in his orchestra. Can you name three that went on to become bandleaders themselves?
9. Can you name the theme songs of the above three leaders?
10. What male vocalists made it big after they left the Duke Ellington Orchestra?

Editor's Note: Author and quizmaster Joe Carlton has written an excellent book, "THE BROWSERS AT LARGE: Phil Holdman's Tall Tales and True." This book containing lots of stories by Phil and other Browsers, along with many, many photos, is still available. Phil and his cadre of big band experts aired a popular big band trivia show on the ABC network with Eddie Hubbard for over twenty years. If interested, please send your check for \$17.00 made out to Joe Carlton, 317 Cottage Avenue, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137 and your copy will promptly be mailed to you.

Mission Statement

This newsletter, created by Bob Knack and friends, remembers The Browsers on the ABC network, Bob's radio shows on WJGG-AM 1530, Elmhurst, Illinois; and contains articles for all aficionados of big band, swing and traditional jazz worldwide. We will concentrate on, but will not be limited to, fun-to-read articles on the music from "back in the day". Initially, we intend to publish as an E-letter only. Letters, articles, suggestions or any help whatsoever is appreciated. Send inquiries to bobknack@hotmail.com or PO Box 642012, Chicago, Illinois 60664. Printed back issues in booklet form are available. E-mail us for info. **We wish to acknowledge the many contributions made by readers to help defray expenses.**

"I don't know anything about running a newspaper, I just try everything I can think of."

-Charles Foster Kane

Remembering "Jumbo"

By Bob Knack

Having a chance to hear Al Hirt 'live' was one of the main reasons I wanted to one-day visit New Orleans.



Alois Maxwell Hirt was born November 7, 1922 in New Orleans, Louisiana. At the age of six, he was given his first trumpet, which had been purchased at a local pawnshop. He freelanced in swing bands led by Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Ray McKinley, Benny Goodman and Horace Heidt. His many hits such as "Java", "Cotton Candy" and "Sugar Lips" endeared him to the record buying public.

Hirt opened up a club in the French Quarter in the Crescent City in 1962. I finally made the trek to Al's Bourbon Street club in 1976. It was a lot like any nightclub you've ever been to. You wait in line for a long time and then the maitr  de escorts you to a table in back although there are always some better ones still empty near the front. There's a two-drink minimum and they bring both at the same time and they taste watered down even before the ice melts. These were the days before "no smoking" sections and the second hand smoke wafts its way through the place and clouds your view.

Nevertheless, you suffer through these few indignities because Al soon steps up in front of his combo and burns through about seven minutes of "Struttin' with Some Barbeque." Now you're having fun. After more Dixieland foot-tappers like "Bourbon Street Parade," Al tells a few stories about his early days with Horace Heidt, which he called "a lousy band". A virtuoso on his horn, he had the ability to "triple tongue". That was a prerequisite to make it in Heidt's trumpet section.

Hirt headlined the half-time show at the first Superbowl game in 1967. In fact, he was instrumental in bringing the first Super Bowl to his home town. A contingent of Crescent City civic leaders traveled to the NFL owners meeting in 1969. Hoping it would be good salesmanship, they brought Hirt along to entertain. As good fortune would have it, Al ran in to "Hoagy" Carmichael in the hotel lobby. Hirt and "Hoagy" serenaded and persuaded the NFL bosses with "Stardust" and "Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans". Al then made a promise that if pro football brought their championship game to his town, he would do the halftime show free. It's widely believed that New Orleans owes "Jumbo" Al a debt for bringing them their first Super Bowl. He appeared in five Superbowl programs. He said he never got paid for any of them.

It all almost ended on February 8, 1970, while he was performing in a Mardi Gras parade. Hirt was injured while riding on a float, hit in the mouth by a brick or piece of concrete thrown by a spectator and coming close to ending Al's playing career. Fortunately, he recovered.

Al recorded more than 50 albums in his career, 22 making the Billboard Pop charts in the 50s and 60s, and played for millions of people around the world including Pope John Paul II and eight U.S. Presidents. He earned four gold albums and one platinum.

Back at the club, Hirt and his band mates stand out in their bright red jump suits as they get down on the "Tin Roof Blues." With the nickname "Jumbo," Al obviously has availed himself of the local, highly caloric, Cajun cuisine. One band member chides him, "Jumbo, you're so big, when somebody tells you to "haul ass", you've got to make two trips!" Halfway through the set, he plays while strolling through the audience, stretching

out on a big band ballad medley and lingers at our table. It's a few magic moments I will never forget. Although Hirt made a name for himself playing in the Crescent City style, he did it all on his instrument. He played great Jazz, recorded with big bands like that of Billy May, starred at Carnegie Hall, and even dabbled in the classics with the Boston Pops. He actually got an early career break on a local New Orleans morning television show, leading the house band and participating in comedy skits. Early on, when the music biz was slow, I hear he worked as a termite exterminator with his pal Pete Fountain.

After a couple more Dixie swingers and before "A Closer Walk," Hirt laments the fact that most of the young New Orleans players don't seem interested in his type of music and when "me and Fountain are gone, the music might die out."

That was over thirty years ago and my memory of that night may be becoming a bit cloudy. Al Hirt's place in the French Quarter was shuttered in 1983. I also heard him play a Jazz date in Chicago and one more time when he was back on Bourbon Street near the end. Hirt died April 27, 1999 at the age of 76, but, thankfully, he was wrong about the music dying out. I have every one of his records. (If you want to hear everything a human can do on a horn in under three minutes, check out his "I Love Paris" still available on RCA.) They put a statue of Hirt in Music Legends Park in "The Quarter" at 300 Bourbon Street next to his long time pal, Pete Fountain. For this Jazz fan, though, without the sound of "Jumbo's" horn, Bourbon Street will never be quite the same.

Ten interesting things about Al Hirt:

1. He was given his first trumpet at the age of six, which had been purchased at a local pawnshop.
2. Al's first professional gig, at the age of 17, was calling the horses to the post at the Louisiana Fairgrounds in 1939.
3. Was a bugler in the United States 82nd Army Air Force Band during World War II.
4. He played at the inauguration of president John F. Kennedy.
5. Recorded the theme music for the 1960's TV show "The Green Hornet", by Billy May, similar to Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Flight of the Bumblebee,.
6. He turned down a chance to record the song "Whipped Cream", which became a big hit, along with the album [cover](#) for Herb Alpert.
7. In 1965, performed for a standing room only concert at Carnegie Hall.
8. In 1987, Hirt played a solo rendition of Ave Maria for Pope John Paul II's visit to New Orleans, a performance Hirt considered one of his most important.
9. Al Hirt has 8 children, 10 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren.
10. Convinced Chicago pianist and composer of "Browsin", the Browsers theme song, Ronnie Kole to move to New Orleans where he has become a jazz legend.

Mini Quiz Answer

Al Hirt sold a million in 1961 with his "Java". The Rolling Stones had "Time Is On My Side" originally waxed by vocalist Irma Thomas. Under the pseudonym of Naomi Neville, he wrote "Whipped Cream" for Herb's brass, and Glen Campbell had a smash with "Southern Nights". His name is Allen Toussaint. His first No. 1 was "Mother-in-Law" by Doe.

"In most swing bands the first trumpet played lead, the second was the hot man, and the third was an alcoholic or somebody's relative."

-Jimmy Maxwell



Makes a great holiday gift!

Ted Butterman's Neo-Passé Band Live At The Village Tavern



Pictured L to R: Russ Phillips, Scott Black, Dave Elias, Ronnie Baron, Ted Butterman

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CD Baby Price: \$15.00

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Four rhythm; piano, bass, guitar and drums, and one of four different world-class horn players on each track .

The over 73 minutes of music includes:

1 When You're Smilin', 2 The One I Love, 3 Sweet Georgia Brown, 4 China Boy, 5 On The Alamo, 6 I Can't Believe That You're In Love With Me, 7 After You've Gone, 8 These Foolish Things, 9 Rosetta, 10 Undecided, 11 Let Yourself Go, 12 Three Little Words, 13 It All Depends On You, 14 Some Of These Days, 15 Lester Leaps In

Ted's band, with a four-man rhythm section, and a rotating horn player, usually stays in a mellow relaxed swing mode. The group, particularly with a clarinet lead, often has the sound of a small group Benny Goodman session.

Ted recorded the band over several weekends between February and June of 2001 and thus captured the best of four Chicago area musicians on the front line. With 15 standards featured over a generous 73+ minutes, the average tune plays for over five minutes, affording the horn players ample room to show their talents.

Eric Schneider, well known around Chicago, played with Basie for a couple years in the early 80's. A wonderful. Perhaps underrated talent, Eric has the ability to take a tune and swing hard with seemingly little effort. Featured on six of the tunes on the CD, Eric takes "Three Little Words" at a nice mid-tempo on the tenor and just rolls with it in very much a Chu Berry style. On "China Boy", he switches to soprano and can be compared favorably to Sidney Bechet. Kim Cusack, long time veteran of the Salty Dogs, plays clarinet on three tunes while Stu Genovese is the featured tenor on "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "These Foolish Things". Russ Phillips, son of Russ, Sr. who played trombone with Louis Armstrong's All-Stars after Teagarden left, capably offers a change of pace with his trombone on three titles notably, "Undecided".

With a rock solid rhythm section, this band cooks. Highly recommended for lovers of small group swing.

--Perry Huntoon

International Association of Jazz Record Collectors Journal

www.cdbaby.com for ordering info or

[Click to See the Neo Passé Band in Action!](#)

News: Sometime during the run of this Nov./Dec. issue of "The Great Escape", our host website www.dixieswing.com will celebrate its 1000th visitor since it was relaunched earlier this year. Check us out and watch the numbers rise!

ANSWERS TO THE BROWSER QUIZ

1. A. Mel Torme B. Sarah Vaughan C. Cab Calloway D. Ella Fitzgerald E. Paul Whiteman F. Eddie Cantor G. Billie Holiday
2. I'm Just Wild About Harry, They Used To Call Her Mary, Oh, Johnny, And Mimi, Don't Bring Lulu, Oh Marie, Her Name Was Rosita, Second Hand Rose.
3. The Tin Man --Jack Haley
4. The Bridges of Madison County
5. Cecelia. It was sung in the manner in which the vocalist sounded a little tipsy.
6. Buddy Poor
7. Paul Whiteman in 1928. Others who made good sellers were made by Hick Lucas, Ukulele Ike, Helen Forrest with Dick Haymes.
8. Harry James, Ziggy Elman and Billy Butterfield.
9. Of the ones I have given, Ciribiribin (James), Zaggin' With Zig (Elman) and Lean Baby (May), respectively
10. Al Hibbler (who was blind) and Herb Jefferies, who went into the movies as a western hero.

Put a Little Summer Fun in Your Holiday Party...



Pictured: T. Bartlett E. Wilkinson T. Butterman J. Kuncl J. Blegen

The Cubs Dixieland Band has been playing the 'friendly confines' of Wrigley Field for over a quarter of a century. Our foot-tapping aggregation consists of Trumpet, Trombone (or Tenor Sax), Clarinet, Banjo, and Tuba. We have appeared on TV hundreds of times over the years on many local and nationally broadcast programs.

The band performs at any kind of function, limited only by your imagination, including picnics, Bar-B-Qs, pool parties, Mardi Gras, conventions and wedding receptions. We have even performed at five funerals. We appear in Cubs uniform unless otherwise specified. There's no off-season for the Cubs Band! Contact Ted at TBBands@aol.com for details. [Click here to see the Cubs band in action!](#)

Our Neighboring Jazz Clubs...

The Illiana Club of Traditional Jazz: presents excellent concerts monthly at the Glendora Ballroom, 10225 S. Harlem Avenue, Chicago Ridge, Illinois. Sunday, November 18th, Mike Walbridge, Sunday, December 16, ICOTJ Christmas party, Riviera Ballroom. 219/923-6775.

The St. Louis Jazz Club: [http: www.stlouisjazzclub.org](http://www.stlouisjazzclub.org)
An outstanding web site and club with lots of events and info. Sunday, November 11, Jeanie Kittrell & the St. Louis Rivermen. Sunday, December 16, Cornet Chop Suey.

BIG BAND BEAT

Fats Waller: Your Feet Too Big!

by Bob Langbein

Reprinted with permission of the author

Trivia Question; Hillbilly songwriter Al Dexter threatened to sue Your Hit Parade for not playing his honky-tonk tune that everyone else was playing. What was the tune?

Thomas Wright Waller was born on May 21, 1904, in New York City. Fats' father was a minister. His mother played piano and organ. Young Thomas began playing the piano at age 6. He left school in 1918 and won a talent contest as a teenager. He began making piano rolls in the 1920s and then records in 1922.

He accompanied blues singer Sara Martin and Rosa Henderson. Under many other names, he played piano and organ in silent-movie theaters. Fats also gave informal piano lessons to Bill "Count" Basie. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Fats recorded with Fletcher Henderson, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Jack Teagarden, Ted Lewis and others. He was featured at Connie's Inn in 1929 and scored songs for the Hot Chocolates broadcast on WABC radio in 1930.

He formed his first band in 1932. The six-piece group played the New York City area and started making records for Victor, establishing him as a recording star. Everybody remembers him more as a piano player and composer than as a bandleader. Some of the many songs he wrote include "Ain't Misbehavin'", "Honeysuckle Rose", "If It Ain't Love", "Stealin' Apples", "Blue Turning Grey Over You", "St. Louis Shuffle", "Lennox Avenue Blues", "Jitterbug Waltz" and "My Fate Is In Your Hands".

If Waller liked a song, he would do a straight version, but on other songs, he would blurt out lines like "No, lady, we can't haul your ashes for 25 cents". On my favorite Waller record of "Your Feet Too Big", he ended with "Your pedal extremities are obnoxious". He sold many of his songs outright and later he was very sorry he had done so. He wrote the melodies for "On The Sunny Side of the Street" and "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" and sold them to Jimmy McHugh.

Fats was a fine jazz musician but it was his singing and humor that made him a star. In addition to the piano, he was able to make the pipe organ swing like no one else. He went to Europe twice, in 1932 and 1938. He appeared in "Hooray For Love" and "King of Burlesque" in 1935 and "Stormy Weather" in 1943. He appeared at Carnegie Hall in 1942.

In late 1939 and 1940, he led a combo that played the New York City, Chicago and Milwaukee areas. He also toured theaters in the same areas. He took his last big band-leading tour in 1941-42. In 1943, he played at the Tic-Toc Club in Boston. It was his last big show. "Early to Bed" opened in Boston in May 1943. He entertained the troops a lot and made a trip to the West Coast. He ate, drank and partied. In December 1943, en route to the East Coast from California on the Santa Fe Chief suicide jumper, he was stricken with pneumonia. He died from a heart attack on December 15 as the train pulled into Kansas City, MO. He was 39.

Trivia Answer: The tune was "Pistol-Packin' Mama". It appeared soon thereafter on "Your Hit Parade". It got up to No. 2 on October 30, 1943.

If you like Big Band music, write the author at 190 Greenwood Avenue, Lakeview, AR 72642-7145 or call me at (870) 431-4575.

Recommended Chicagoland Happenings...

"The Browsers", experts in the big band era, meet the last Friday of every month @ the Villa D'Oro Restaurant, 5531 N. Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, and (773) 775-2820. Dues are six dollars and include a share of the pizza. Call ahead. Details subject to change



Browsers Bob Unterreiner and Karl Kountz talk things over at the monthly Browsers confab.

Photo courtesy of Perry Huntoon

Disc Jockey "Rowdy" Ron Richter plays big band and jazz the second Sunday of every month at Matty's Wayside Inn, 1727 Waukegan Road, Glenview, Illinois, in the lounge. (847) 724-1314 4:00 PM - ? Attendees are invited to bring a favorite CD to play and comment on. Call ahead. Details subject to change

On the Radio: Carousel Bandstand: (Thursday 10 to 11 a.m.): "Ken Meyer draws from his own vast, personal music library to present an hour of the best of the big bands, standards and great vocals of that golden era of music. Ken also presents many of the big band radio shows from the Aragon, Waldorf Astoria, and network radio studios. Sometimes if it sounds a little scratchy. It's because Ken plays much of the music from original 78 rpm records." **WEPS-FM 88.9, Elgin, Illinois.**

Big Band Anecdotes in New Book

Those of you interested in the big band days will enjoy a recent book written by big-band pianist Al Lerner, now in his 80s and still playing. Lerner's book, "Vamp 'Til Ready," chronicles his days as a sideman with Harry James and Tommy Dorsey. He also was accompanist and often music director for singers Dick Haymes, Rosemary Clooney, Frankie Laine, Kay Starr and Pat Boone.

Lerner began his career on the road in 1939 with Harry James, who was just starting his band. James heard 17-year-old Lerner playing piano while in Cleveland, Al's hometown. He offered Lerner a job which he accepted and joined the band later in New York. From there he never looked back.

His later experience on the West Coast working with so many music personalities there made him the accompanist of choice for many Hollywood stars. Some of Lerner's most interesting anecdotes are about popular TV star George Gobel and Alan "My Son the Folk Singer" Sherman, for whom he was both accompanist and orchestra director.

Lerner has organized his tales about the many entertainment legends he worked with into individual chapters, making it easy reading. The book is published by Bear Manor Media and may be ordered on the internet at www.bearmanormedia.com or by mail at Bear Manor Media, P.O. Box 71426, Albany, GA, 31708. Price is \$14.95.

-Chuck Sengstock