

FROM THE CHAIR

Those of you who attended the fabulous Woody Herman Orchestra concert, in tribute to Dr. Herb Wong, know that it was very special.

But I want to address those of you who could not attend for one reason or another. So, let me take you along, on my shoulder, as if you had been there with me. Hopefully, that will give you a sense of what it was like and some insight into what Herb would have said was "a one-time only experience."

We drove to the Center for the Performing Arts, located at nearby Menlo-Atherton High School, entering the large parking area. We then walked to the ticket window and purchased our tickets from either Patty Boyle or Claire Mittler. We then entered the spacious hall where our tickets were taken either by Shirley and Chet Douglas or Ron Sax and Kay Knox. (Thanks to all the above for your help, by the way.) We find our seats and are immediately struck by the positive ambience of the place, with its open and clean sight lines, comfortable seats (with ample room for my long legs). Settling in, we notice on the stage a collection of 16 players, each traditionally dressed in coats and ties, seated behind band stands, getting prepared to blow the roof off.

And blow they did. I cannot recall all the numbers they played, but "Four Brothers" came on early and set the pace. I'm sure that many in the audience had their own special recollections of the offerings.

Some may have remembered going to a nearby ballroom or college prom where Woody played and there was an evening of listening and dancing. Others perhaps recall a sock hop where there was a phonograph that played WHO 78 records over and over. [Grandpa, what's a phonograph? What's a sock hop?]

I met one person there who had been a member of a top local high school band that Herb had reviewed and later went to the Monterey Festival and played for Woody, the guest conductor.

For me, I was taken back to a long ago evening in Massachusetts where I heard one of the Herman herds LIVE. I don't recall which herd, but I do remember the name of the gal I took—Jackie. Wonder what ever became of her. . .

Just before the break, three young players from Aragon High School in San Mateo walked out onto the stage



PAJANS enjoying the balmy weather and great music on Valentine's Day weekend at the Newport Beach Jazz Party: Shirley Douglas, Jan De Carli, Bruce Powell, Linda Knipe, Beryl Gaidos, Anne Hessing, Theresa and Karl Robinson.

to join the WHO for a stimulating rendition of "Woodchoppers Ball". This was added value for the audience and a wonderful opportunity for these youngsters (who did themselves proud). All in keeping with PAJA's mission to support jazz education.

After the potty break, we thrilled to more of the sound that only a big band can produce; the acoustics of this hall worked perfectly. I cannot transfer to you all the feelings and emotional response that resulted for me. But do look at the enclosed special color insert of Andy Nozaka photographs of the concert. They give some sense of being there.

I do want to acknowledge the presence at the concert of Colonel Gaddy from Georgia and Nathan Davidson from Minnesota. They are Woody Herman fanatics who travel to all the WHO gigs they can, and we were happy to welcome them to our show. They helped us and the WHO in various ways during the set-up.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that the whole event would not have been possible were it not for the outpouring of donations that you provided, led by sponsors Mercy and Roger Smullen and the anonymous Four Brothers. And thanks once again to Event Chair Harvey Mittler for the many hours he spent in putting this landmark concert together.

In continued appreciation,
C. Stuart Brewster

Trials, Tribulations and Triumph

The Woody Herman Orchestra Directed by Frank Tiberi, The “Ultimate Tribute” to Dr. Herb Wong Observations by Harvey Mittler, Event Chair

The WHO concert on January 25, 2015 was the first event produced by the Palo Alto Jazz Alliance without the guidance of its acclaimed producer, Dr. Herb Wong, one of its co-founders. The board of directors entrusted me to lead our efforts to present this world-class big band, and as we proceeded, I discovered what a complex, large undertaking it was. Although I worked as Herb’s apprentice and attended to many details for 19 years, he was the renowned jazz icon with the contacts and goodwill to attract all the famous jazz artists to the Peninsula. The board and I embarked on the voyage to bring top notch jazz to our listeners without Herb’s steady hand on the tiller.

Obviously, many people contributed hard work to complete the many necessary chores, and many people contributed funds to meet the high cost of assembling 17 musicians from around the United States. It also is true that several involved institutions helped us reduce costs and stay in the black for PAJA’s education fund, which is the means to accomplish our nonprofit mission of promoting jazz education.

Shortly before his death in 1987, Woody Herman designated Frank Tiberi to be the band’s director, and he remains its conductor and plays Woody’s clarinet parts, as well as playing one of the three tenor saxophones in the ensemble and occasionally the soprano sax. Another constant is Mike Brignola, whose tenure as the road manager, commenced at the same time. Mike gathers the musicians and coordinates their flight arrangements from cities across the U.S., while playing the baritone

sax and leading the reed section. Mike gave me flight arrival and departure times to help plan such details as ground transportation from and to the airport, established travel times from the hotel to the show and back, and we settled on the food and beverages for the band at the auditorium.

I could take several pages thanking various entities and volunteers who contributed to the success of this concert, but briefly: the Sequoia Union High School District who own the concert hall, the City of Menlo Park, our longtime graphics designer Carroll Harrington, Omega Printing who did the program and postcard, the Sheraton Palo Alto where the musicians stayed, and our volunteer drivers and helpers at the concert: Patty Boyle, Claire Mittler, Max and Lori Jedda, Sam Pearl, Larry Lovercheck, Stuart Brewster (5:30am run to the airport on Monday), Akira Tana who put together a Yamaha drum set for us, Troy Davis (music director at Aragon HS who organized the three student musicians and also allowed Mike Brignola to use his Selmer baritone sax!), Kay Knox, Chet and Shirley Douglas, Ron Sax. I’m sure I’m omitting someone, but these are the ones I can think of off the top of my head. Thank you, one and all.

Producing the concert presented some daunting challenges and some unexpected turns. After the contract was signed, there were countless emails sent, most generated by me. WHO CEO Stew Jackson jested that he never had seen an individual use so much time tending to details, and he said he hoped I spent as much time and energy on my law practice.

Planning a pre-concert meal for 17 musicians proved to be quite complex; there were vegans and others with limitations and strong preferences for food and beverages. After shopping, it required a few trips to carry the food and drinks from my car to the green room.

The enthusiastic reception of our audience buoyed my spirit. It was a pleasure to spearhead PAJA’s efforts to bring “The Band that Plays the Blues” to play for our members in our neighborhood. As part of our educational purpose, it was especially rewarding that the Orchestra invited the three high school students (tenor sax, trombone and trumpet) to solo and sit in on “Woodchoppers Ball”. The young men not only played well, but they were ecstatic about the experience of playing with the professional musicians in the Band.

As mentioned, it takes incredible effort to make an endeavor of this size succeed, but it surely is a lot of fun, especially when it is acknowledged as an artistic and financial success.



Harvey Mittler, PAJA’s hard-working Events Chair, introduces the Woody Herman band. This was the first concert Harvey did double-duty at, also filling Herb Wong’s shoes as Artistic Director and Concert Promoter./Photo by Andy Nozaka.



THE JAZZ CURMUDGEON

The Curmudgeon mellows out this issue and waxes enthusiastic about the recent Jazz Cruise. Who could not love a Festival-at-Sea that, at its final jam session, put nine (9!) of the best trumpeters in jazz on the stage at one time (Brecker, Sandoval, Stafford, Roditi, Lynch, Stripling, et al.) and then, after a quick change of musicians, segues into "So What" with the great Christian McBride and Monty Alexander on the bass-piano intro? Wow.

Rambling Impressions of a Boatload of Jazz

Floating around the Caribbean for a week. . . soaking in the sun. . . and the island sights. . . and the wall-to-wall straight-ahead jazz. Well, there's only one word for it—Yowza! Fun in the sun and great music too. Yup, it works just fine.

These are some of my impressions of the musicians whose full sets I enjoyed. If you get an opportunity to catch any of these groups in the Bay Area or elsewhere, do it!

• **Gregory Porter** got the opening jam session off to a good start with his rumbling baritone rendition of "God Bless The Child." A 2014 Grammy winner for Best Jazz Vocal Album, Porter showed us his chops with strong soul, R&B and gospel influences. From Bakersfield, this man does California proud.

• **Cyrille Aimee**—a little Frenchy with an Orphan Annie hairdo. Sings with a girly voice and touch of charming accent. She's subtly sexy, cute, has a punchy delivery with a wide smile and easily holds everyone's attention. Her pianoless quartet uses a pair of fluent young gypsy guitarists who light up her sound. She was one of the big hits of the cruise.



• **Christian McBride**, with young pianist extraordinaire Christian Sands and Ulysses Owens, Jr. on drums. This trio put out terrific music. McBride is king of the bass and his trio played clean, imaginative licks, straight-ahead, but so cool. Fabulous stuff, even if Mr. Owens

overhit his skins a tad.

• **Monty Alexander** of course plays all over the keyboard in an Art Tatum-ish style, melding one tune with another into very listenable medleys. He is talkative, amusing, and simply one of the great entertainers in jazz. He played a set with old mates Jeff Hamilton (d) and John Clayton (b) that was outa sight. These guys know each other so well, they are in each other's heads. And their performance was memorable, sublime.

• **Byron Stripling** does Louis Armstrong like no one else. One of Louie's nicknames of course was Satchmo, for his satchel mouth. Stripling has one of those, and he loves to mug, like Louie. He sings well and plays one hell of a trumpet. A nice, clean attack, on the money. A true virtuoso with that horn, a superb talent. His 1 ½ hour history lesson on Armstrong and his influence was a highlight of the cruise.

• **John Pizzarelli** is crack-up funny, a fine guitarist and sings like a real crooner. While his style is heavily influenced by Nat King Cole, for the boat audience John did a set of Sinatra covers that had the audience believing Old Blue Eyes was back! Very entertaining guy, and getting better all the time.

There were plenty of other top-drawer, marquee jazz artists on board, people like Arturo Sandoval, who in addition to the trumpet is a demon piano player; Phil Woods, still hanging in there; Houston Person and his mellow tenor; Jeff Hamilton (Ed Thigpen would be proud); Joey DeFrancesco, with not only the B3, but flugelhorn—and he sings too—all quite brilliantly.

I could go on, but the best thing to do by far is to get yourself a roomy and buy a ticket for the 2016 Jazz Cruise. The boat leaves on Sunday, January 17. Call 1-888-852-9987 to reserve your cabin. We'll all have a great time together. Really./Michael Griffin

TOOTIE ON PHILLY JOE

This is the first except from a remarkable interview with drummer Albert "Tootie" Heath posted in 2009 on Ethan Iverson's blog, "Do The Math." Iverson asked him how he ended up playing on the famous album, "The Incredible Guitar of Wes Montgomery": "I can't remember. Maybe Orin Keepnews called me when Philly Joe Jones didn't show up or something. That's what [drummer] Art Taylor said, that his whole career was based on Philly Joe not showing up. . . Philly Joe played piano too, like so many great drummers. Kenny Clarke could play piano, but he was really into vibes . . . until he heard Milt Jackson. . . Anyway, apparently Philly Joe could play his ass off at the piano as long as it was in the key of F."

DANA LEONG PERFORMS MARCH 21

The ultra-versatile Dana Leong, equally at home on electro-jazz cello and trombone, returns to his alma mater, Carlmont High School, "to share his unique 'hip hop meets avant-jazz sound,'" At age 14, Dana was PAJA's original scholarship recipient (1994). The concert is Saturday evening, March 21, at 7pm at the Carlmont HS Performing Arts Center. For tickets: www.carlmontmusic.com. \$15 for adults, \$10 seniors/students.

MORE FROM TOOTIE HEATH

Soon after John Coltrane died, Tootie called Trane's bassist Jimmy Garrison to play on a gig with him. "I'd love to, Tootie," said Garrison, "but after playing with Coltrane for so long, I don't know any songs. After seven years of vamps, I forgot all the tunes!"

THE JAZZ PERISCOPE

Selected gigs for March and April

YOSHI'S OAKLAND *www.yoshis.com/oakland*

3/10	Kendrick Scott, with Taylor Eigsti.....	8pm
3/14	Pete Escovedo Orchestra.....	7:30, 9:30pm
4/24-26	Rachelle Ferrell	

SF JAZZ CENTER *www.sfjazz.org/center*

3/19-22	René Marie	
4/9-12	Terence Blanchard (various).....	7:30pm
4/9	Tammy Hall (plays Shirley Horn).....	8, 9:30pm
4/23-26	Charles Lloyd	
4/25	Gerald Clayton Trio.....	11 am

BACH'S DANCING & DYNAMITE SOCIETY, EL GRANADA *www.bachddsoc.org*

KUUMBWA JAZZ CENTER, SANTA CRUZ *www.kuumbwajazz.org*

3/25	Anat Cohen Celebrando Brasil.....	7pm
4/23	Tommy Igoe Groove Conspiracy.....	7pm
4/30	LeBoeuf Brothers.....	7pm

SAN JOSE JAZZ WINTERFEST *www.sanjosejazz.org*

3/5	Mads Tolling Quartet, with Tierney Sutton Café Stritch	7:30
3/7	Diane Schuur	7pm San Jose Stage Co.

ANGELICAS 863 Main St., Redwood City *www.angelicasllc.com*

Every Tuesday evening Jazz on Tuesdays Trio + vocalists 7:15pm
 3/10, 17, 24, 31, 4/7, 14, 21, 28
 3/15, 4/19 Mike Galisatus Big Band..... 7pm

CARLMONT HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER *www.carlmontmusic.com*

3/21	Dana Leong in Concert.....	7pm
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CAFÉ STRITCH 374 S. 1st St., San Jose *www.cafestritch.com*

HOTEL SOFITEL 223 Twin Dolphin Dr., Redwood City 650/598-9000
 Wednesday evening jazz, with Michael O'Neill and vocalists 6-9pm



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