

Adventures & Recollections
of
Grumpy Old Men
-a jazzy little combo-

Since 1990, the *Grumpy Old Men* have been playing songs from the Great American Songbook that they particularly enjoy. The majority of the members, over the years, have been graduates of Murray State University and had in common having played in the Phi Mu Alpha “Men of Note” band and the “Campus Lights” orchestra on campus. Likewise, they had shared experiences in local and regional groups such as the Sellars Leach Orchestra, the Tom Lonardo Orchestra, the Jack Staulcup Orchestra, The Moderns featuring Nancy Adams, the Bill Havell Combo, the Oliver Hill Band, the Charlie James Orchestra and others.

In the mid-80’s, Chuck Simons, a professional drummer, retired from his music store business and had a desire to play in jazz combos, much as he had done in the 40’s and the years following his involvement in service bands.

Simons had played in many area dance bands in a 300-mile circumference of his business in Murray, KY. These involved big bands of 20 or more players, society bands of 9-12 players and combos of 3-5 players/vocalists.

Following his retirement, Simons joined with a fellow-enthusiast named Richard “Dick” Ready (pronounced Ree-dy) to form a combo that would stick primarily to standards and the big band “Straight-Ahead” and bebop tunes of the 30’s and 40’s. Also included, by choice of Ready, would be some quasi-Dixieland and boogie-woogie style tunes.

Simons and Ready recruited local musicians Jim Fern (bass) and Roger Reichmuth (saxophone) to fill out the combo. Fern also had a big band under his own management called the “Music Makers”.

Ready eventually chose to be involved to a lesser extent and H. Pruitte, a retired band director and MSU graduate, took the piano position. Upon Simons passing away, Ready’s nephew, Benji Bohannon, who was a former student of Simons, took over as drummer. At this time, the group called themselves “Chuck’s Swingin’ Buddies” in honor of Simons.

When Bohannon left the group, Dean Hughes of Princeton, Kentucky, became the drummer. Then the group was composed of H. Pruitte, piano; Jim Fern, bass; Dean Hughes, drums and Roger Reichmuth, saxophone. All but Hughes were graduates of Murray State University and had attended the institution in close proximity to one another. It was at this time that Fern came up with the name, borrowed from the Jack Lemmon/Walter Matthau movie, “Grumpy Old Men”. Reichmuth added “A Jazzy Little Combo” to the title.

Three of the members-Pruitte, Hughes and Reichmuth- have remained since 1990. Fern passed away and Joe Tarentino, a MSU grad who had moved back to the area after retiring from teaching, became the bass player. However, after a year, Tarentino was lured back to Marietta, GA to do some more teaching and Scott Thile, instrument technician at MSU, became the bass player. Somewhere along the way, Thile felt a need to devote more time to family and job, at which time Tarentino resumed the bass position. Fill-in bass players, when one of the regulars was unavailable, have included G. R. Davis, Brad Hammack, Bobby Harper, John Ownby, and Danny Rowland. Pianists who have filled in occasionally include John Arnn, Bruce Dudley, Todd Hill, Tom McBryde, and Hans Nelson. Substitute drummers have included Jason Munday, Collin Baker, John Hill and Danny Shepherd.

When Joe and Pat Tarentino relocated back to Kentucky, after having taught and performed in Atlanta for many years, they formed a combo named Jazzin' which also featured Pruitte and Hughes. On several occasions, the groups combined to do shows together and also performed as "*Grumpy Old Men and One Dazzlin' Dame*", with Pat Tarentino as vocalist. On three occasions, vocalist Anne Cowherd performed with the group as "*Grumpy Old Men and One Dazzlin' Dame*". On one occasion, the group was booked to perform on the mainstage at Bowling Green's Fourth of July Celebration. Anne Cowherd was featured as vocalist and trombonist Ray Cissell was added for this "show".

At a point in time, pianist H. Pruitte began contributing original compositions and arrangements to the musical book. At present, the "*Grumpy Old Men*" play thirty of H's arrangements, enough to fill an entire three-hour engagement. In October 2010, the group recorded a sampling of them in two evening sessions in the pianist's apartment.

"H" retired after a Christmas party gig in December 2010 and the group continued with the fortunate availability of Donny Howard, a professional pianist/arranger and elementary music teacher living in Clarksville, TN.

Gigs over the years have ranged in Kentucky from Louisville, Frankfort, Bowling Green, Owensboro, Madisonville, Calvert City, Paducah, Fulton, Eddyville, Grand Rivers, Marion, Hickman, Murray, Mayfield, Princeton, Cadiz, Hopkinsville and Ft. Campbell. The group has played in the Tennessee towns of Collierville (Memphis), Union City, Troy and Nashville. Illinois engagements have included Harrisburg and Metropolis.

Venues have included the Belle of Louisville (paddle-wheel excursion steamboat, the Galt House, the Star (excursion boat), Lake Barkley State Park, Kentucky Dam Village State Park, Kenlake State Park, the Paducah Executive Inn, the Summit in Owensboro, the Owensboro Executive Inn, the Fulton County Club, Murray Country Club, Princeton Country Club, the Black Oak Vineyards, Reelfoot Lake Conference Center, The Bull Pen, and the Murray State University venues of the Curris Center, Murray Room, Regional Special Events Center, quadrangle and President's Lawn.

Occasions have included wedding receptions, engagement parties, banquets, private parties, birthday celebrations, national and regional conferences, political rallies, fine arts series and, in two instances, funeral visitations.

The "*Grumpy Old Men*" enjoy their music and each other (well, most of the time). They have stuck with their policy of "You don't hire us; we interview you!" If the answers given by the clients are the correct ones, they are then given the pleasure of booking the band, knowing what to expect and anticipating a highly enjoyable occasion.

Roger Reichmuth, August 2, 2010

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