

Intermezzo

cfm
chicago federation of musicians
local 10-208 afm

Membership Meeting:

Tuesday, August 14th, 2012
@1:00 pm

Constitution and Bylaw Meeting:

Tuesday, September 11th, 2011
@1:00 pm

August 2012
Vol. 72 No. 7

THE LEGENDARY



EMPIRE ROOM

SEE PAGES 12-13

From the President



GARY MATTS

Summertime News

It's the good ol' summertime. That's the time when as the songs say, the livin' is easy, the days are lazy, hazy and crazy. However, as far as business at the CFM goes, things are far from easy, lazy or hazy. Crazy? Sometimes.

The CFM and the Chicago Park District recently reached an agreement for the Grant Park Orchestra. Their hard work paid off in the form of a three year agreement (2012-2014) which was ratified by the orchestra members and approved by the Chicago Park District Board. I would like to thank the orchestra committee members, John Floeter, Neil Kimmel, Michael Shelton, Mary Stolper and Thomas Yang who spent many hours reviewing surveys, formulating proposals and participating in the negotiation process. Thanks also to Vice President Terry Jares and CFM counsel Pat Collins assisted by Michele Cotrupe.

Negotiations are underway with the Lyric Opera and the Chicago Symphony whose contracts have expired or will expire before the beginning of the next season this fall. Negotiations are also ongoing for a first time collective bargaining agreement for the musicians of the Chicago Sinfonietta.

Speaking of summer, this is the perfect time to get out and enjoy performances of CFM musicians whether inside or out. It is also the perfect time to introduce the concept of music played live, by professional musicians, to someone who may think music comes from downloads on an ipod. The Grant Park Orchestra has a couple of weeks left this season. The CSO has performances at Ravinia. The Green Mill and Andy's and the Jazz Showcase feature some of the city's most creative musicians, many of whom are CFM members. Theatrical productions at the Chicago Shakespeare, Goodman, Broadway in Chicago, Marriott Lincolnshire and Drury Lane Oakbrook Theaters all employ CFM members. Take time before the summer is gone to enjoy music played live by the best professionals in the business. Introduce a young listener to the real sound and excitement of experiencing music created on the spot, in the moment. There is nothing like it.

NOTICE

Constitution and By-Law Meeting:

Tuesday, September 11th
at 1:00 PM at the Union Hall:
656 W. Randolph St., 2W
Chicago, IL

Local 10-208 of
AFM AFL-CIO
CHICAGO FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS
OFFICERS - DELEGATES
2011-2013

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Cover illustration provided by
Chris Nolan Creative.

Cover Photo: Empire Room with unidentified act
and band. (Courtesy of the Palmer House archives.)

From the Vice-President



Terry Jares

Survey

The Survey Committee brought many good suggestions and recommendations to the CFM Board of Directors for consideration. The Board will be reviewing these ideas to decide the future direction of our Union.

During these discussions, there were conversations about contracts and why members are performing jobs without filing. There was a general feeling that the process is "too complicated" and "too much work". For new members, this may be true, however we have an easy way to make the process simple. Quickfile!

We complete the paperwork for you. Call the Union, ask for Quickfile and you will be connected to a member of our staff that will take the information about the engagement from you, complete the necessary paperwork and send you copies for your purchaser to sign. It's Fast, It's Easy, It's Done!

One Percent Solution

Questions have been asked about One Percent Solution and what it is. One Percent Solution is a list of volunteers that want to be part of the Chicago Federation of Labor's call to action. If any organization in the labor community is holding a demonstration or strike, the volunteers of One Percent Solution will be notified. Most recently we have participated in the NABET (National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians) protest against the Chicago's three biggest local television stations. Our local used the One Percent Solution to mobilize against Big League Theatricals during their presentation of Music Man at the Chicago Theater and against Feeney-Hackett Productions during the performances of The Rat Pack at the Royal George Theater.

If you would like to be a part of the One Percent Solution, please contact Sandra at 312-782-0063, ext. 136 or send her an email at scastellanos@cfm10208.org.

SAVE THE DATE
"THAT'S AMORE!"
LIFE MEMBER PARTY
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19th
12PM-3PM
MORE INFO TO COME



Who, Where, When...



By Ruth Marion Tobias

AWARDS

Both **MEI-ANN CHEN**, music director of the Chicago Sinfonietta, and the orchestra have won important awards from the League of American Orchestras. These national awards were presented at the recent 67th annual national conference in Dallas. The ASCAP first place award went to the orchestra for “adventurous programming of contemporary music. Director Chen was awarded the **HELEN M. THOMPSON** Award honoring one conductor every other year whose potential for an important national and international career is recognized. Congratulations, Ms. Chen.



Mei-Ann Chen

BACK HOME AGAIN

The amazingly talented pianist **JUDY ROBERTS**, returned from Arizona to her hometown in a musical blaze of glory with a recent weekend performance at Jazz Showcase. Her quartet not only brought out a bevy of fans from days gone by, but presented the opportunity to make music with her husband **GREG FISHMAN**, Chicago’s groovy, cool saxophonist. We hope they continue being Chicago delights, offering their amazing display of musical skills. It’s good for the soul.



Judy Roberts

F.Y.I.

Writer **RICK KOGAN** gave a detailed endorsement of the beautiful and quite magnificent Nichols Concert Hall in Evanston’s Music Institute of Chicago. Describing it as “a gem of a performance space,” he included obscure facts as well as current details extolling its virtues. “The hall seats 500 and has perfect acoustics. It is enhanced with Greek revival style pillars, chandeliers, a vaulted ceiling and a stage that accommodates nearly 40 musicians”—a breathtaking vista. “The Institute was designed and built in 1912 by New York architect **SOLON S. BEMAN** and for nine decades it served parishioners as the First Church of Christ, Scientist. Purchased and restored in 2001, it reopened as a concert hall in 2003.” Beman came to Chicago in 1879 and built many Chicago treasures such as the Fine Arts Building, Blackstone Public Library and much of Pullman, the first planned company town on Chicago’s far south side. The institute is a community music school “offering music education, art therapy and collaborative programs that serve more than 9000 students.”



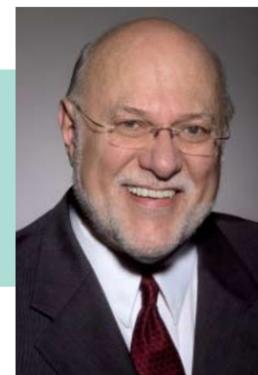
Nichols Hall

Guitarist/singer **PAULINHO GARCIA** and vocalist **GRAZYNA AUGUSCIK**, back in Chicago, offered their adaptation of Beatles’ originals from their “Beatles Nova” CD at the Old Town School of Folk Music, followed by an evening at Katerina’s—a two day celebration of the CD they introduced in Europe which has now been released in the U.S. Garcia transformed “the chordal vocabulary far beyond anything the Beatles attempted. It is the Beatles’ music enriched with the sophistication of jazz harmony, the seductive sway of Brazilian rhythm and other variables”—high critical acclaim. Garcia has also resumed the “one-Saturday-a-month Samba night” at Katerina’s with a quartet comprised of Two For Brazil (Garcia and Greg Fishman) and percussionists **GERALDO de OLIVEIRA** and **DEDE SAMPAIO**.

The Hyde Park Jazz Society has been swinging with such performers as **CECILE SAVAGE**, bass/vocals with her trio which includes drummer **CURTIS PRINCE**; and also multi-reedist/composer/educator **GEOF BRADFIELD**’s quintet...The Jazz Institute of Chicago with its JazzCity series brings free music into the city parks. Hamilton Park on west 92nd Street was regaled with a recent summer tribute to **DIZZY GILLESPIE** by a trio of trumpeters. Included in the mix

was **LARRY BOWEN** backed by a band that included trombonist **TOM GARLING** and bassist **STEWART MILLER**... Referred to as “the intrepid violinist (who) freely mixes mainstream Afro-Cuban, avant garde, classical and other idioms, depending on the occasion” **JAMES SANDERS** performed “Completing the Circle—A Musical Meditation for World Peace” backed by a bass, varied percussion and Indian flute accompanying dancer **RAPHAELLE ZIEMBA** at SGI-USA Chicago Cultural Center, 1455 S. Wabash Avenue... **RICH DANIELS** conducted his City Lights Orchestra to celebrate America’s Independence Day in a free concert in Centennial Park West, Orland Park. It has been a very summery summer—if you enjoy heat we had plenty of it and little rain; not good in some ways but a boon for outdoor events.

Continuing the outdoor events, **FRANK WINKLER** will conduct his Symphonic Pops Orchestra of Chicago in its 24th annual appearance at Prairie Arts Center in Schaumburg (201 Schaumburg Court) Saturday, August 25, 7 pm. Featuring vocalists **LISA BRUECK** and **GIL OLIVA**, the concert is free and open to the public.



Frank Winkler

It was gentle and amusing when **JACK ZIMMERMAN** took the stage at Uncommon Ground (the Devon Avenue restaurant and performance space) to tell us more of his humorous family stories. He has that rare knack of painting a vocal picture with witty embellishments and always a gentle punch line to invoke smiles—he makes you feel good. What probably invoked Jack’s own good feelings along with the rest of us, was the musical backing by his son **ANDREW**’s trio playing original music to open the show and to enhance the interludes between Jack’s stories. A few weeks later Jack and **HOWARD LEVY** were guest performers on storyteller/humorist **GARRISON KEILLOR**’s *A Prairie Home Companion* show broadcast from Ravinia Park. Levy’s harmonica truly embellished Keillor’s tales and hometown vignettes.

AND THEN...

FRANK D’RONE turned 80 and was the feted guest of honor at the Green Mill as **ERIC SCHNEIDER**’s quartet performed. Frank’s own rousing celebration with his quartet at Jazz Showcase occurred at the end of June. Projecting “authority born of decades in front of ensembles large and small,” his performance was hailed as “bringing surging rhythmic power” to his vocals, all enhanced by the “beguiling touch” of his guitar. His latest CD release is “Double Exposure”... and former Chicago piano artist **DR. LOUIS KOHNOP**, now living in Florida, turned 92 in April. Congratulations to both.



Frank D’Rone

ALEXANDER HANNA has been appointed principal bass player by the CSO succeeding **JOSEPH GUASTAFESTE** who retired in 2010 after a 49 year stint in the orchestra. Mr. Hanna comes from the Detroit Symphony where he served as principal bass since 2008. He already has served CSO playing principal bass on the recent Russia/Italy tour. A native of Bowling Green, Ohio, his symphony performance includes the Philadelphia, Cleveland and Boston orchestras and he is a prize winning Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center. (Our thanks to **JOHN von RHEIN**)

WE KNEW THAT!

Well, maybe not exactly “that” as evidenced by a recent Northwestern University study, it determined “lifelong playing of musical instruments has a positive impact on the brain.” **NINA KRAUS**, a neuroscientist at NU, is principal investigator of its Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory. “Hearing what your spouse says in a noisy restaurant is harder when you are older,” she explained, “but this study shows that musicians are faster at processing noise than non-musicians are. It shows there is a biological impact of musical training. A musician has to be constantly picking out sounds from others; playing music makes our nervous systems more efficient.” See, we kind of intrinsically knew that, but Kraus has nailed it.

And now for the best part: she worked with study participant, Evanston’s **RICK WUNDER**, who has played trombone since he was a child. Electrodes measured how his nervous system responded to the sounds he heard. The upshot from Kraus is that “the study is affecting education policymaking. Educators are using our website to argue for funding for continuation of musical education based on biological evidence that continued musical education matters.” Yess!

New and Returning Members



By Leo Murphy

The musicians listed below are new and returning members to the Chicago Federation of Musicians, Local 10-208. They represent a few of the many musical groups around Chicago. They perform in orchestras, operas, bands, chamber groups, free-lance groups and as soloists. They have different talents, perform in different genres and work in various venues, but they all share our love of music and a desire to pursue their love as a profession. They have made a decision to join us as professionals in our Union. If you meet them on a job, whether on a bandstand, in a pit, or a stage introduce yourself and get to know them.

Isabelle Rozendaal Acct# 56680 (Violin/Baroque Violin/
Viola/Vocalist)
1216 W. Sherwin Ave.
Chicago, IL 60626
312-501-3705
isabellerozendaal@gmail.com

Michael Salter Acct# 56679 (Tenor Saxophone/Bass
Clarinet/Clarinet) is originally from Chicago. He graduated
from Northern Illinois University and his instructors include
David Sanchez, Steve Duke and Local 10-208 member
J. Lawrie Bloom. He is an active performer and works with
the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic. He has been Adjunct Faculty
at the Elgin Community College for the last 15 years.
2046 W. Cortez St., Apt. 1
Chicago, IL 60622
773-343-7503
masalter23@hotmail.com
www.michaelsaltermusic.com

Vijay Tellis-Nayak Acct# 55798 (Keyboards/Guitar/
Percussion/Piano) is a returning member.
2657 W. Farwell Ave.
Chicago, IL 60645-4522
773-467-7935
4677935@gmail.com

Oliver Townsend Acct# 56096 (Piano/Conductor/Organ) is
a returning member.
5845 Tennessee Ave.
Clarendon Hills, IL 60514
708-528-1917
playgreatmusic@hotmail.com

Armaan Yazdani Acct# 56751 (Trumpet/Piano) was born
and raised in Chicago. He attended St. Patrick High School
and then the University of Illinois/Champaign-Urbana where
he is graduating with a Bachelor of Music degree in Jazz
Performance Studies/Trumpet. His instructors include John
Badsing, Kevin Carroll, Scott Anderson and Tito Carillo. He
has performed in jazz bands and musical theater productions
throughout high school and college. He teaches privately,
mostly to beginning students.
7913 Lenora Ln.
Elmwood Park, IL 60707
708-452-9330/312-343-1212
stpatsatchmo@yahoo.com

WELCOME!

CFM Bits and Pieces



By Rich Daniels

Union Stewardship

There are many things that I have little or no knowledge about in life. There are a handful of topics on which I have just scratched the surface. And there are even more things that require an educated opinion in order to even begin an intelligent discussion. But some things come from the gut and are just part of our DNA. To that end, I'm basing this brief article upon the following opinion/notion:

GIVING IS OPTIONAL IN LIFE

It's true. Unless you're under duress from an employer or work for a politician, giving is by and large optional in life. We don't have to participate. However, in my 32 years as a member of this local I have found that not only do most of our members not subscribe to that way of thinking but that they have gone above and beyond what they might do for others. I have found that the contrary attitude that "giving is a moral imperative" permeates those amongst us to whom much has been given. And that would include everyone reading this article and possessing a membership card in this organization. As musicians, much has been given to all of us.

And while these times remain very difficult for the vast majority of us, it's clear to me that the glass remains half full because like you, I have been allowed to exercise whatever gifts I possess in the endeavor of being a professional musician. That is a gift that you cannot put a dollar sign on.

It's with that very attitude of gratitude and stewardship that our local has sponsored a variety of interns over the past 7 or 8 years. These are largely kids in their mid to late teens and very early twenties. The internship tends to last between 10-12 weeks and has typically occurred in the summer, though we have also brought one intern into the fold this past winter. More so, though we have recently reached out to other avenues for interns, this all started by allowing the at-risk youth who live at the Mercy Home For Boys and Girls in Chicago to become summer interns at the CFM. Usually, we would have

one intern in the summertime, though sometimes two. The kids are basically paid minimum wage and work 12-16 hours a week, but in doing so they receive a wealth of knowledge about our industry and we create a lasting positive impression upon them that will last a lifetime.

If you are not familiar with Mercy Home, it has been in Chicago for 125 years on the near west side (1140 W. Jackson). My family and I and my friends and colleagues have been supporters and active donors for the past 23 years. The Home gives roots and wings to the most at-risk population of kids in our city. Children who have been cast aside by their families and in many, if not most cases, seriously damaged or abused either physically or emotionally. And while the Home is run by the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, the children living there come from every race and religion imaginable (at any given time only about 20% of the residents come from a catholic background). There are no borders or boundaries for being a child in distress.

Our union has chosen to embrace the mission of the Home and allow these kids to be a part of our work place so that they can learn about our industry but also be guided in the ways of responsible behavior and the real value of working hard. Though he would never want credit for this, Dean Rolando has been a significant part of the mentoring process for these children at the union taking each of these kids under his wing and working with them both in and outside of the union.

Yes, giving is optional in life. But as has often been said, we receive so much more by giving than through receiving. The teens who have passed through our doors as interns over these years have left with an understanding of our industry, an ability to work hard and be productive and more so, the knowledge that they too are now expected to go out into the world and do good for others. It may not be what we have to do as musicians. But it truly feels like a requirement as a member of the human race.



Obituaries



Address and Phone Changes

Josephine S. Goldman

1922-2012

Josephine S. "Jo" Goldman, beloved daughter of the late Max and Libby Schnitzer, died peacefully in her sleep at age 90 on Thursday, June 14. Josephine had a long career as a violinist, beginning with the Lawrence Welk Orchestra and the Women's Symphony in Chicago, and later with



the Evanston Symphony, the Highland Park Strings, the Treasure Coast Symphony, and for many appreciative audiences in Chicago and Florida. She most recently resided in the John Knox Village retirement community in Orange City, Florida, where she had many friends.

Josephine was the beloved

wife of the late Howard J. Goldman and beloved sister of the late Lillian (Morris) Baker. She is survived by her brother, Norman (Sheila) Schnitzer; her children Barbara M. Goldman, Bruce (Marjorie) Goldman, and Stephanie Goldman Meis (Theodore Edel); her grandchildren Ben and Nora Goldman and Libby and David Meis; and many loving nieces and nephews and friends. A memorial service and concert will be held at a later date. Her memory is truly for a blessing!

Blake L. Sherwood

1921-2012

Blake L. Sherwood, 91, of Downers Grove, IL passed away June 8, 2012. He was an Army veteran of World War II and an "Entertainment Specialist," who played saxophone in the Army band. For over 70 years, Blake was a professional musician who played 13 woodwind instruments with many professional bands and hundreds of celebrities. Blake sang and did impersonations of Ted Lewis and Jimmy Durante. One of our fondest memories is Blake singing and ending



the night with the Lewis impersonation of "Is Everybody Happy?" He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Therrie, his loving daughter Mara (William Leone) and son, Rob. Predeceased by his son Blake Jr. (Debra). He had four grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Above all, he will be remembered for his great sense of humor. All his family and friends enjoyed him and he will be sorely missed.

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3700 Cedar Lake Ave., Apt. W-309
Minneapolis, MN 55416
612-925-7250
VIOLIN

56483 Archbold, Timothy E.
601 Dawes Ave.
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137
316-295-0448
CELLO

56720 Branigan, David D.
8108 W. 124th St.
Palos Park, IL 60464
708-254-0759
708-254-9931
GUITAR

54133 Garth, Walter L.
36947 N. Deer Trail Dr.
Lake Villa, IL 60046-6736
224-372-7689
312-215-4425
GUITAR

56674 Hobbs, Ryan J.
90 N. Parkside Ave.
Glen Ellyn, IL 60137-5773
630-715-2720
TRUMPET

54101 Janicki, Christine M.
19534 Brookfield Circle
Tinley Park, IL 60487
773-205-5953
773-531-6251
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54397 Matta, Thomas E.
4901 N. Winchester Ave. 1st Fl.
Chicago, IL 60640
773-463-0344
BASS TROMBONE

54501 Miller, Christie L.
1325 W. Greenleaf, Apt. G
Chicago, IL 60626
312-405-2303
CLARINET

54246 Parrish, Charles F.
4146 N. Monitor Ave.
Chicago, IL 60634-1715
312-933-7639
TRUMPET

53747 Pokorny, John E.
6101 E. North Sheridan Rd.
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708-227-4764
773-564-9463
TUBA

55499 Stewart, Leslie M.
68 Fenwick Place
Atlanta, GA 30328
424-653-8146
ELECTRIC PERCUSSION

30357 Walsh, William P.
26247 N. Highland Dr.
Mundelein, IL 60060
847-566-1889
DRUMS

31138 Wayne, Fred
471 Majestic Gardens Blvd.
Winter Haven, FL 33880
217-412-0378
ARRANGER

Obituaries

May they rest in peace

Last	First	Instrument	Died	Born	Elected
Di Cato	Caesar	Accordion	06/26/12	03/26/14	05/19/33
Gluskin	Burrell J.	Piano	06/06/12	10/17/26	12/26/46
Lacey	Albert D.	Bass Violin	05/11/12	09/14/20	01/30/41
Pribyl	Jerry J.	Drums	06/23/12	09/16/25	09/02/48
Sherwood	Blake L.	Clarinet	06/08/12	01/11/21	07/13/39
Teske	Reynold C.	Saxophone	05/25/12	05/07/17	12/04/41
Tootelian	Robert J.	Bassoon	07/03/12	07/13/22	07/18/40

2012-2013 Membership Directory Corrections

- 54773 **McNamara, Timothy**
1415 Wisconsin Ave.
Berwyn, IL 60402
773-454-6694
SAXOPHONE
timmcnamaramusic@gmail.com

Who's Playin' Where?

We have many musicians performing throughout the area. Support them by attending a performance or patronizing an establishment where they work.

Go Cubbies!

Gary Pressy
Per Cubs Schedule
Wrigley Field
1060 W. Addison

Ravinia Festival
Highland Park, IL
Huey Lewis and The News
Friday, August 10th at 7:00pm
Mary Chapin Carpenter
Sunday, August 19th at 8:00pm

Boone County Fair
Belvidere, IL
Rodney Atkins
Saturday, August 11th at 7:30pm

On the Waterfront Festival
Rockford, IL
Billy Currington
Friday, August 31st at 9:00pm

See a Show!

The Second City
Jesse Case and Julie Nichols
Sunday through Saturday
1616 N. Wells St.
Chicago, IL

Drury Lane Oakbrook
The 39 Steps
July 5th - August 12th
630-530-8300

Marriott Lincolnshire
Heros
Through August 19th

House of Blues
Chicago, IL
George Thorogood & the Destroyers
Sunday, August 12th at 9:45pm

If you have future engagements that you would like listed in this column, please send them to Vice-President Jares at tjares@cfm10208.org. Listings will be included provided there is a Union contract on file.

Club Calendar

ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL ORCHESTRA LEADERS

Regular meeting at various locations every third Wednesday of the month. For further information, please contact Brian Patti, (630) 832-9222
www.bandleaders.org

CZECHOSLOVAK-AMERICAN MUSICIANS CLUB

Regular meeting fourth Tuesday of the month, 8 p.m. at VFW Post # 3868.
8844 West Ogden, Brookfield, IL 60513
(708) 485-9670

GERMAN AMERICAN MUSICIANS CLUB

Third Monday of the month. Regular meeting, Mirabell Restaurant, 3454 W. Addison, Chicago, IL, 8 p.m. Send all communications to Mr. Zenon Grodecki, 5024 N. Moody, Chicago, IL 60630 (773) 774-2753

SOCIETY OF ITALIAN AMERICAN MUSICIANS SOCIAL CLUB

Third Monday of the month. General meeting, Superossa Banquet Hall, 4242 N. Central Avenue, Chicago, IL 60634, 8 p.m. Send all communications to John Maggio, 6916 W. Armitage, Chicago, IL 60635 (773) 745-0733

THE KOLE FACTS ASSOCIATION

Third Sunday of the month at 2 p.m. Regular meeting, Washington Park Fieldhouse, 5531 S. King Drive, Room 101, Chicago, IL 60637

POLISH AMERICAN MUSICIANS CLUB

Meetings held every second Wednesday of the month, 8:00 p.m. at A.A.C. Eagles Soccer Club, 5844 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL. Send all communications to Dave Lenkos, President, 4548 N. Mobile, Chicago, IL 60630 (773) 685-5226

WELCOME MAESTRO DANZMAYR

David Danzmayr has been named Music Director of the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra and will lead the orchestra's upcoming 35th concert season. Maestro Danzmayr, guest conductor for several leading European orchestras, will become the first new Music Director of the IPO in more than 25 years.

Danzmayr has worked as a guest conductor with leading orchestras including the City of Birmingham (England) Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Mozarteum Orchester, the Haydn Orchester Bozen, and the Sinfonieorchester Basel. Earlier this month, Danzmayr was appointed Music Director of the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus, Ohio, beginning with the 2013-2014 season. Danzmayr recently served as assistant conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra for three years and is a regular guest conductor and tutor for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the Australian International Symphony Orchestra Institute.

"We are indeed fortunate and very proud to introduce David Danzmayr as the new Music Director of our fine orchestra. Maestro Danzmayr is an extremely talented and energetic young conductor with a dynamic personality," said Richard Moutvic, IPO President.



THE EMPIRE ROOM OF THE PALMER HOUSE: A CLASS ACT

By Charles A. Sengstock, Jr.

Chicago was not only a prominent music center but a great show town too. From shortly after 1910, when the cabaret trend began in earnest, to the early 1970s, nightclubs thrived in the city. Among the crème de la crème of the show rooms in later years was the Empire Room of the Palmer House. The late nightlife critic for the Herald American and Chicago American newspapers Charlie Dawn said, "It was a class spot. It was the class place"

The Palmer House had become a world-famous hotel. The current hotel building is the third. It was built in two stages. In the early 1920s the main dining room in the eastern half was called the Victorian Room and still exists. Jules Herbuveaux, an early Chicago leader and later well-known TV executive in 1925 led his Palmer House Victorian Orchestra in the room, broadcasting over WJJD and recording for the Vocalion label.

The green and gold Empire Room was in the western half, completed a few years later. It opened for luncheon and early pre-theater dinner with Ralph Ginsburg's five-piece string ensemble serenading patrons.

The Empire Room was transformed to a show room in May of 1933, before the repeal of Prohibition that December. It was a late starter compared to other more venerable Chicago nightclubs. The opening act at the Empire Room in 1933 was the heavily promoted dance team of Veloz and Yolanda. The dance team and its orchestra, later led by Shep Fields, became a big hit and remained in the room for thirteen months. Veloz and Yolanda became a national favorite and returned to the Empire Room many times in subsequent years.

Shep Fields was succeeded as leader of the V&Y orchestra first by George "Spike" Hamilton and later by master accordionist Jerry Shelton, both alums of the Fields organization. Shelton was active in Chicago into the 1950s.

The Ted Weems band moved into the Empire Room as the featured entertainment following Veloz and Yolanda. From that point forward dance bands became the main attraction, with supporting acts, until the 1940s. A long list of name bands followed Weems including Tommy Dorsey, Hal Kemp, Ray Noble, Eddie Duchin, Guy Lombardo, Wayne King and Tommy Tucker. Small local Chicago bands like that of Phil Dooley often played for dancing between shows in which the name bands were featured.

The WGN remotes emanating from the room were often fed to the whole Mutual Broadcasting System, then the largest U.S. radio network, and helped the nightclub achieve a national reputation. These broadcasts, along with other pickups by the ABC radio network, continued until the room closed years later.

Merriel Abbott, who also featured her own dance troupe, booked all the attractions at the Empire Room from the beginning. The Merriel Abbott Dancers were a highlight of every show. Her vast knowledge of show business and her tasteful selection of acts was a big part of the room's success through the years. The room became a key Chicago booking for most of the name acts along with the Chez Paree.

In September of 1941 pianist Griff Williams and his band followed the Tommy Tucker Orchestra into the room. Originally a big hit in San Francisco and other west coast hotels a few years earlier, Williams most recently had been playing in the Continental Room of the nearby Stevens (now Conrad Hilton) Hotel.

According to a Charlie Dawn article in the Chicago Herald American, "Griff...told the sophisticated first-night audience that the Empire Room was the top achievement of his career..." Little did Griff or the band realize that it was the beginning of a record engagement. The Williams tenor-band style was so popular with Empire Room dancers that it was held over for forty weeks. The supporting act of dance team Raye and Naldi shared the opening billing with Griff Williams.

That policy changed shortly after the Williams band began playing at the Empire Room, especially during the war years. Name acts began appearing: Jimmy Durante, Sid Caesar, Hildegard, Maurice Chevalier, Carol Channing, Liberace, George Goebel, the Kim Sisters and a host of others.

Griff Williams was given a sixteen-week-a-year contract. But in 1942, the contract was later extended to "for the duration" of World War II. But the band moved out for a road tour in early 1944 to clear the decks for Hildegard and the Ran Wilde orchestra. Hildegard, who returned 1948, was reputedly paid \$4,000 a week, according to Robert Blau in a 1986 Chicago Tribune article. Two years earlier, Liberace, then only an opening act, received only \$900, a pittance compared to what he made years later in Las Vegas. By this time, the booking policy again changed and only a headliner would be booked, eliminating the supporting show and even the audience's favorite Merriel Abbott Dancers.

Griff Williams (in the Navy for a few years) brought his band back to the Palmer House in 1946 after the war, but the new policy change accelerated due to the influence of television and other factors like changing entertainment habits. A few other bands came and went, mostly as featured attractions: Carmen Cavallaro and Henry King, to name a few.

During the 1940s and early 50s, Lew Diamond, the industrious local bandleader and his band played the off-

nights at the Empire Room, one of the Chicago hotels and clubs he covered each week when the regular bands took their nights off.

In 1957, the hotel decided to give up its name band policy and hired local bandleader Ben Arden to organize a band to play for the shows and for dancing. The band would only leave when an act brought in its own band or the main attraction was a band, as in the case of Guy Lombardo, who came in to play his final engagement at the Empire Room in the early 1960s. Arden and his band remained at the Palmer House for a record seventeen years. He backed headliners like Sophie Tucker, Maurice Chevalier, George Goebel and others.

Peggy Lee, who was booked into the nightclub in September of 1975, brought focus to the dilemma the Empire Room was facing increasingly in the late 1960s and 70s. Many of the big attractions were also playing in Las Vegas where they worked in large showrooms and were backed by huge orchestras. This made it difficult for the much smaller Palmer House showroom (said to hold between 300-500 people) to compete.

Ms. Lee, according to Sam Lesner of the Chicago Daily News, was paid \$20,000 per week and asked for a 35-piece orchestra. Frankie Masters, the house leader at the time, only had an eleven-piece band. He had to add 24 more musicians, at an additional \$11,000 a week. Masters told the author during an interview he predicted the costs of rehearsals would become prohibitive and put the smaller hotel rooms right out of business.

And that's pretty much what happened. Seeing the handwriting on the wall, the management of the Palmer House (owned since 1945 by the Hilton Corporation) decided it was time to lower the curtain on the fabled room. So in January 1976, with Phyllis Diller as the main attraction backed by Norm Krone's band, the Empire Room, Chicago's last remaining hotel showroom, closed.

From 1976 to 1979 the Empire Room served lunch only. In 1979 management resumed dinner service and again tried a dance band policy hiring Victor Lombardo's band. For a while, local singer Polly Podewell and a five-piece combo were featured and still later Norm Ladd played an engagement with his big band to provide dance music until about 1981.

Since then the room has returned to a luncheon only policy and is available for special events. The glory days are behind it, but if you stand in the recently restored room, as beautiful as always, you may catch an echo or two of the celebrities, bands and personalities that played there during its glamorous past.

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Griff Williams band at the Stevens (now Conrad Hilton) Hotel in 1939 before their long stay at the Palmer House. First row: far left is Bob Kirk, who would later take over the band, and Joe Poretta, saxes; Back row: from right, Tex Langston, bass, left; Buddy Moreno, guitar and vocals; and Walt King, drums and vocals. (Photo courtesy of Walt King.)



Hildegard, the well-known vocalist and pianist who played the keyboard with her gloves on, was frequently seen at the Empire Room in the '40s and '50s. (Photo courtesy of Larry Bastian.)



Guy Lombardo's band playing its last engagement at the Empire Room circa early 1960s. (Author's collection)



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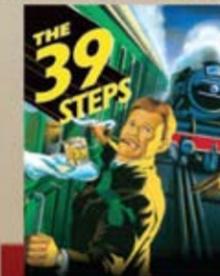
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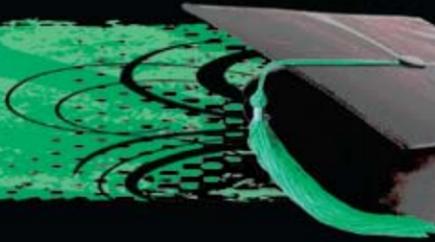
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