

Swingtime

The Region's Only Good Music Magazine!

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Swingtime Jazz Society

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**The Dave Fisk Quintet is playing for the
Swingtime Jazz Society on January 12. See Pages 8 & 9.**



Mike Lawrence, Andy Hearn, Dave Fisk, Joe Finn, Steve Lambert.



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The Swingtime Story

By Tim Coakley

C. Robie Booth, known to many of us as Chuck, Robie or even Charles, started Swingtime Magazine some 30 years ago, at first as a newsletter for seniors. It was a glossy magazine, sometimes 16 pages long. He and his associate, Sarah Duncan, produced each issue. "I did a tremendous amount of writing and editing," he said recently.

After about seven years of publishing, he said, "Jerry Porter and I were discussing putting on a series of concerts featuring big name artists. ... Our first concert was at Revolution Hall in Troy featuring the Lee Shaw Trio." Since that time, Swingtime has evolved into the Swingtime Jazz Society, an organization that presents four concerts a year, all featuring top regional musicians.

Robie began writing about jazz in Utica at the Daily Press when he was 22 years old. "I tried to persuade the editors that I was ready to do a column," he said, "and after about three years they let me have a jazz column. That was in 1956."

His column was called Jazz Beat, and in it he covered local jazz events and interviewed some of the major musical groups that appeared at big venues, including the Stanley Theater, which is Utica's equivalent of Proctors.

"At that time, we had the greatest swing bands in the world," he recalled, "from Duke Ellington to Ray McKinley, The Dorsey brothers and Stan Kenton. It was at the Clinton Arena that I asked Stan Kenton if I could speak to him after the concert, and he said 'Yes sir.' Immediately after the event, this beautiful young woman from WIBX said, 'Mr. Kenton, I'm on deadline; could I speak with you?' And Stan said, 'Yes ... right after I talk to Chuck.'"

Most of Robie's interviews with bandleaders were cordial. "The first one to give me a hard time was Woody Herman," he said. "I think he thought I was too young and inexperienced to interview him. But the second time I talked to him, he was very nice."

The Utica jazz scene was prolific for its size and Robie was an active part of it. "I had formed something called the Mohawk Valley Jazz Society," he said, "and we sponsored a great many concerts with (vocalist) Dolores Mancuso, saxophonist J.R. Monterose, drummers Ronnie Zito

and Jimmy Wormworth, and others."

He moved to the Albany area in the 1960s, and began writing for the Knickerbocker News. A woman named Ellen Lane was writing a column for the paper called The Night Owl, and eventually Robie took over the reins. When he started Swingtime, The Night Owl became the title of one of the features of the new magazine, and it included his reviews and comments on the local music scene – and some outrageous puns.

In addition to sponsoring concerts and publishing the Swingtime magazine, Robie has given out nearly 20 Swingtime Lifetime Achievement Awards honoring musicians, music teachers, disc jockeys and others who have been part of the Capital District music scene.

Over the years, his comments and photos have been a major feature of each issue of Swingtime. Although he has turned over the publication of the magazine to some longtime members, he will remain a big part of the organization and a staunch supporter of good music in all its forms.



C. Robie Booth in November, 2016

Our thanks to Syncopated Times for allowing us to reprint this article by Russ Tarby from their November 2019 issue:

Skip Parsons has kept the Riverboat Jazz Band afloat for 63 years!

In September 1956, Albany, NY-based clarinetist Skip Parsons played his first gig with his Riverboat Six at the Van Schaick Tavern in Cohoes, N.Y. He was 20 years old.

"The group, which included drummer Tom Brown and cornetist Dick LaVoie, caught on and began to travel the college and night club circuits," Parsons recalled. "In those days, people were really interested in Dixieland music."

Since then the Riverboat Jazz Band has appeared with a veritable Who's Who in American Jazz including Doc Cheatham, Cutty Cutshall, Jimmy McPartland, Wild Bill Davison, Pee Wee Erwin, Bobby Hackett, Spiggle Willcox, and Kenny Davern.



The Riverboat Six in 1957 at Dale's Restaurant in Albany, NY, corner of Central and Clinton Avenues. This was shortly before adding a seventh member and changing the name to Riverboat Jazz Band. (L-R) Dick Picotte, trombone; Stan Muraski, piano; Jim Lawyer, bass; Don LaVoie, cornet; Tom Brown, drums; and Skip Parsons, clarinet. Source: Albany Times Union

Parsons and the RJB returned to Central New



Skip Parsons (Nov. 13, 2004)

York for the first time in six years to play a concert for The Jazz Appreciation Society of Syracuse on Sunday, Sept. 8, at the Spaghetti Warehouse, on the north side of the Salt City.

Parsons, who celebrated his 83rd birthday in March, plays soprano sax and clarinet and occasionally vocalizes. On Sept. 8, the Riverboat Jazz Band also featured bassist Pete Toigo

(pronounced Tu-wee-go), drummer Tim Coakley, banjoist Crick Diefendorf, trombonist Ken Olsen, and Massachusetts cornetist and singer Rich Downs.

All attired in white slacks and dark shirts, the Riverboaters swung through two solid sets of classic jazz from "Tin Roof Blues" to "Basin Street Blues." Cornetist Downs vocalized "Singin' the Blues" as Parsons recalled Tram's C-melody sax work on his clarinet. Downs lent his voice again to "Rose of Washington Square," and he plugged a Harmon mute into his horn to evoke turn-of-the-20th-century New York.

Diefendorf sang a rollicking rendition of "Make Me a Pallet on the Floor," on which the leader soared on clarinet. Parsons again reveled on the reeds with Lil Hardin's "Struttin with Some Barbecue," and trombonist Ken Olsen channeled Jack Teagarden on "Muskrat Ramble."

Parsons' voice may not be quite as powerful as it was 40 years ago, but he ably sang "You Can Depend on Me" in the first set and "Basin Street" in the second, and his reed work remains as strong as ever!

The Riverboat Band is proud of its long and harmonious history. "It was about 1960 when I decided to run my band like a business," Skip says. "It's really the only way, if one is at all serious about keeping the ship afloat – riverboat in this case. Somebody has to do the real work, and now with this world of computing, taxes, and red tape, it's a necessity. Other musicians in the clan often have to rescue me on musical mat-



The Riverboat Six (1957) at Reiner's Barn in Loudonville, NY. (L-R) Dick Picotte, Stan Muraski, Tom Brown, Don LaVoie, Skip Parsons, Jim Lawyer on roof.

ters, but it's all part of the same scenario. Whatever works, works.

"As far as the music," he says, "I have to separate the business from it in order to keep swingin'."

During the 1970s Skip continued to front the band as well as doing appearances with Pee Wee Erwin, Bobby Hackett, Ed Hubble, Russell Moore, Vic Dickenson, and several engagements with a band fronted by Doc Cheatham.

To begin the 1980s the Riverboat JB was named the official jazz band at the Lake Placid Winter Olympics. Employment by ABC Sports projected the Riverboat Jazz Band sound literally around the world on television throughout the entire duration of the games.



Skip Parsons, Tom Scannell, Hank Dwyer (drums), Norm Pratt, Ernie Belanger (sousaphone), and Don LaVoie (banjo). The Skip Parsons' Riverboat Jazz Band was the official Jazz Band for the February 1980 Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid, NY.

with Some Barbecue," "Buddy Bolden's Blues," "Bourbon Street Parade," and "I'm Confessin'."

Skip's desire to promote and produce musical events brought about his organization of the Great Northeastern Traditional Jazzfest in Greenville, N.Y., in 1978 and 1979, at which the RJB was the main focus. Several top artists to participate were Pee Wee Erwin, Bob Wilber, Kenny Davern, Dick Wellstood, Joe Muranyi, and the Salt City Six.

Skip also organized the Lake George Hot Jazz Party & Cruise which began in 1979 and was hosted by the RJB for 20 years. Festival appearances have included Newport at Saratoga; Ottawa International; Syracuse's Bix Bash; and the New Jersey Jazz Society's Pee Wee Russell Stomp.



The Riverboat Jazz Band at the Schenectady Locomotive Club about 1957. L-R: Bob Monroe (trombone), Tom Brown (drums), Jim Lawyer (bass), Don LaVoie (trumpet), Carl Lunsford (banjo), Harold "Chick" Austin (piano), Skip Parsons (clarinet)

Later in the '80s, to keep the sounds of Dixie alive, Skip began working with smaller groups too — trios and swing quartets.

The Riverboat band suffered a setback in 2014 when it lost its regular twice-a-month engagement at The Fountain restaurant, at New Scotland Avenue, in Albany. The group held down that job on the second Friday and Saturday of each month for 43 years, since 1971.

Although the gigs aren't as plentiful as they were 50 years ago, Skip's commitment contin-

ues into the new century as he schedules plenty of park and gazebo concerts, cruises, festivals, and nightclubs.

And Parsons has a new home base, McGeary's Pub, in Albany's Clinton Square on the second Monday night of each month. McGeary's Pub is located at Clinton Square, Albany; (518) 463-1455; mcgearyspub.com. To get to McGeary's, motorists must turn south onto Chapel Street from Clinton Avenue (Palace Theater) and proceed one block to a parking lot on left at the corner of Chapel and Orange.



Rich Downs, Tom D'Andrea, Skip Parsons (soprano sax), Ernie Belanger, Rich Skrika, and the hand of Bernie Mulleda (2006 Oct 13, L-R)

For artist information and gigs, visit skipparsons.com. All pictures in this story are from skip.clifflamere.com, a wonderful site documenting the full history of the Riverboat Jazz Band put together by Cliff Lamere, who has been photographing the band for years.



Russ Tarby is based in Syracuse, NY, and writes about jazz for *The Syncopated Times*, *The Syracuse New Times*, *The Jazz Appreciation Society of Syracuse (JASS)* *JazzFax* Newsletter, and several other publications.

SIDE-BAR:

Hope on the horizon

Veteran Upstate NY jazzman Skip Parsons chatted with *The Syncopated Times* about a surprisingly satisfying jam session that unfolded at one of his last gigs at The Fountain restaurant.

Q: Tell us about your experience a few years ago with a group of young musicians from the Dirty Dozen Brass Band and some swing dancers who accompanied them.

A: Yeah. There have been a few young musicians in our area making an effort to play early-style music. Seems the Dirty Dozen Brass Band was booked at a local college for a concert. Some of these young musician friends who attended the concert brought some of the Dirty Dozen to the Fountain for a look-see, after the concert. Before I knew it, there were five trombone players, seemed everywhere within the place, with their horns-a-blowin.' A gal from Connecticut, who played great trombone, brought her guitar-playing boyfriend to join in the fun. Jammin' just like old times! Except 50 years ago, mine were usually after 3 a.m. I got a chance to meet and play with some great cats that way. Indeed, great memories and a "hands-on" education as well. Not enough of that anymore.

Q: What do you think the future holds for traditional jazz?

A: It often seems like we're the last of the old guys. But after seeing these kids around here, my hopes are somewhat brighter. They come in the Fountain late and ask for more. Sometimes there is about 20 of 'em. They slide the tables aside and dance, too. Ha! Plus they ask for "That's a Plenty," "St. James" and "Dixieland One-Step." They even applaud after a good solo, yep, a good solo. Imagine that? I have said over the mic occasionally, "What's-amatter? Haven't ya ever seen a bunch of old guys kickin' ass before?"

One More Quote:

"Funny, if you go to a gig with problems on your mind, you discover after the gig the music has become a natural therapy. When you're playing, you can't think of anything else but the jazz, and the troubles get set aside." —Skip Parsons

Swing Music in the Capital District

By Michael Catoggio with research assistance by Bill Schilling

The greater Albany area featured a vibrant music scene during the Swing Era, 1935-1945. We set out to explore this forgotten piece of our local history.

Why forgotten? Our research revealed no substantive histories of the local Swing Era scene. A scattered article here or there. It quickly became apparent that we had to stitch this tale together from scratch.

While the famous Big Bands came through town, we directed our focus on to the local bands and musicians.

Was Albany swinging? You bet! We took a close look at 1938 through 1942. Each year, well over 70 venues featured live music – in bars, nightclubs, hotel ballrooms, dance halls.

Some Swing Era places still exist. The Manor Inn at 77 Washington Avenue in Rensselaer hosted a couple of very prominent local bands.

The Horton Girls' Orchestra played the Manor. The Horton family lived in South Bethlehem. They were managed by their father, Aub Horton. An advertisement appearing in the April 8, 1939, issue of *Billboard Magazine* stated: "Horton Girls' Orchestra and Revue 'Real Rhythm' feature[ed] the Horton Sisters: Maxine, Shirley and Madelon, Stars of Stage and the Radio..."

Today we know the Manor as Jimmy Casey's restaurant.

The Manor Inn also hosted the Mike Pantone Orchestra. Pantone began his career with a famous local group in the 1920s called the King Jazz Orchestra. Pantone operated a music

school on lower Madison Avenue in Albany. Perhaps his most renowned student was William Kennedy.

Pantone formed his own band in the early 1930s. By 1935 he was a local fixture. He played long gigs at the Lark Tavern on Madison Avenue. Pantone died at the young age of 41, at home at 342 Madison Avenue, just down the street from the Lark.

Stuarts was an upscale nightclub at 4 Sheridan Avenue, just off North Pearl. Today the building houses a Mexican restaurant.

The Francis Murphy Orchestra played the club frequently. Stuarts was owned by a lawyer by the name of Irving Doling, who just happened to play piano for the Orchestra.

Francis Murphy, born in Albany, was classically trained. He formed his band in 1933. Arguably, his Orchestra was the preeminent local big band. They were one of the few area bands to



At Lark Tavern

MIKE PANTONE and his orchestra, appearing tonight at the Lark Tavern, 453 Madison Avenue.

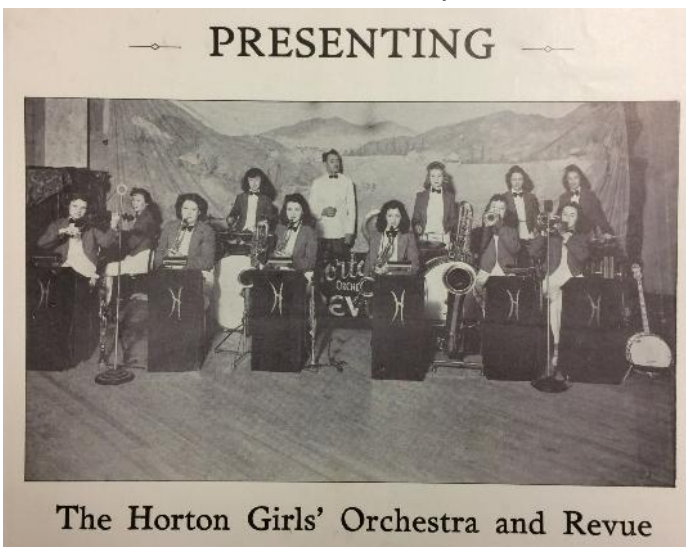
Fun, as always, can be had at Skippy's on Market street with the Skippy Trio to entertain you behind the bar.

Davey and other old time favorites, at Smith's Tavern, Pawling avenue, Troy—now air cooled for your comfort and convenience.

Drop in the cocktail lounge of the Klub Eagle, 32 Eagle street, any afternoon and hear Princess Betty Ann. Never a cover or minimum

The new Amber Room of the Lark Tavern on Madison Avenue is the setting for Mike Pantone and his orchestra every Saturday night when they are presented for your

From the T-U, May 3, 1941



The Francis Murphy Orchestra, taken at Stuarts Night Club on Sheridan Avenue. It is from the author's family photo album.

play the Kenmore's Rain-Bo Room. They played the Ten Eyck Roof Garden and their prestigious Flag Room. They were regulars at the DeWitt Clinton. They broadcast frequently on WOKO radio.

In 1940 they played "the season" at Riley's Lake House, outside Saratoga Springs. The

Lake Houses were where the social elite went to wine and dine on August evenings after a day at the races.

Most of the other clubs in Albany have been lost to parking lots, arterial ramps, and new construction. But in those vacant spaces hover the ghosts of Albany's swinging past. Skippy's Music Bar

From the T-U, Sep. 9, 1939

sat on Market where the Skippy Trio featured a young Skippy DeSair, who went on to play with Woody Herman. Big Charlie's Harlem Grill was located at 52½ Hamilton, now a vacant lot across from the Greyhound station. African American Jimmy McGriff played at Dale's Grill on 51 Central. The Jimmy D'Angelo Band had a long-running gig at the University Grill at 85 South Pearl. Hal Turner's Rhythm Boys held court at Club Frolics at 79 South Pearl.

Other notable local bands and venues: Pete Emma's Band played Gerald's in Guilderland. Paul Parker and His Orchestra played Hunter's Clinton Height Inn in East Greenbush. Gordie Randall and his Orchestra played Air-O-Dance, a giant dance hall 12 miles outside Albany on Route 20. Randall later became the bandleader at WGY.

And while the locals played their horns downtown, the rich and famous came to town. Our grandparents paid their forty-five cents at the Palace box office to see Glenn Miller, Benny

Goodman (in July, 1938; see below), and Fletcher Henderson. The air was sweet with beautiful sounds.

The Grande Dame of them all was the Kenmore's Rain-Bo Room, where Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, and Tommy Dorsey with Frank Sinatra swung in an intimate setting.

The epicenter of the Swing Era was certainly New York City. But now, thanks to our research, we can celebrate the part our local musicians and venues played in bringing this rich cultural moment to the Capital District.

(Note: Our thanks to *Swingtime Magazine* – back issues became a valuable source in our research.)

Dave Fisk Quintet on January 12

Dave Fisk is a saxophonist in Albany, NY. Dave's interest in music started at a young age. His father, David Fisk Sr, was the source of his inspiration. His father (an amateur musician) introduced him to many styles of music from Mozart to Hendrix to Paul Simon to Stan Getz. But it was when Dave's father played Miles Davis's album "Jazz Traxx" that Dave became hooked on jazz. The group on the album contained such notables as Julian "Cannonball" Adlerley on alto sax and John Coltrane on tenor.

Dave entered the Crane School of Music as a saxophone major pursuing a degree in music education with a minor in jazz studies. At Crane he studied with Robert Faub and Brett Zvacek. He also had the privilege to study with other musicians such as Dave Dempsey, Jim Corigliano, Joe Magnarelli, Mark Vinci and Ralph Lalama.

After Crane, Dave started his professional teaching career at the Taconic Hills Central Schools. For the past 12 years he has been at Niskayuna Central Schools, where he is the director of the high school jazz ensembles and also the director of the high school concert band. Teaching music, especially jazz, has become a passion for Dave and continues to inspire him to this day.

In addition to teaching, Dave has been a regular performer in the Capital District. As a leader of a quartet he has performed regularly at local venues. He is also a member of Keith Pray's Big Soul Ensemble and has had the honor of being a guest with many other area jazz musicians. He has also performed with the Capital Region Wind Ensemble, Empire Jazz Orchestra (as a sub), Leo Russo Octet, and the Leo Russo Big Band.

Steve Lambert has been playing trumpet professionally in the Capital District for many years. Early in his career he performed with, and learned from, some of the best musicians in the area, including Nick Brignola, Mike Canonico, Rennie Crain, Mike Wicks, George Muscatello and Brian Patneaude. Steve moved to New York in 1999 to pursue a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Columbia University, after which he worked in the office of Second Floor Music for two years as assistant to world-renowned jazz trumpet player/arranger/ producer Don Sickler.

While on staff at Second Floor, he interacted with such legends as Jim Hall, Renee Rosnes, Charli Persip, Ray Bryant and Rudy Van Gelder. There, he worked on many SFM publications including "The Thelonious Monk Fake Book," "Sing Jazz!" and Charli Persip's "How Not To Play Drums." Steve also freelanced around Manhattan, working at such jazz clubs as Kavehaz, Louis and The Garage, and honed his chops while frequenting many jazz jams around the city, including those at Smoke, The Lenox Lounge, Smalls, and Cleopatra's Needle. He returned to the Capital District in 2003 where he enjoys playing with many of his old jazz friends, as well as freelancing in the show, commercial and classical circuits.

Guitarist **Joe Finn** was born in Hartford, CT, the son of an amateur pianist and composer, and was surrounded by music from the beginning. By age ten he was playing his first guitar and giving lessons to kids in the neighborhood. After high school he got a bachelor's degree in music at SUNY Plattsburgh and had the good fortune to play and study with Roy Burns, James Spaulding, Jim Miller, Billy Hawkins and Kirk Nurock.

After college, he spent ten years traveling the United States and Canada playing the guitar in a wide variety of situations. Finn has now settled in upstate New York where he concentrates on local performances and teaching. He has been featured in various festival and concert settings for several years since the release of his initial CD as a leader in 1991. The album, *Straight Ahead*, received critical acclaim as well as extensive national airplay.

His quartet's subsequent appearance on the BET network's Jazz Discovery Showcase won their 1998 award in the jazz instrumental category. Five more independent CD releases (*Guitar Signatures and Duets*, *Blue Tomorrow*, *Destiny Blue*, *String Theory* and 2019's *Generational Dynamics*) have helped to establish Joe's reputation as one of today's top players.

Mike Lawrence has been playing the upright bass since age 10 and the electric bass for over 15 years. Playing in bars and clubs with bands from age 16, Mike has been hooked on playing music for a

(Continued on Page 11)

SWINGTIME

Jazz Society

swingtimejazz.org



Proudly Presents

Dave Fisk Quintet



Sunday, January 12, 2020, 4-6 p.m.

Followed by an open jam session 6-7p.m.



Wishing Well Restaurant
745 Saratoga Rd (Rte 9)
Wilton, NY

Pub menu and beverages available for purchase
Open to the public - \$15/person (\$5 for students)

Reservations: Ralph Rosenthal at (518) 423-9343 or rosenthalralph@verizon.net

Swingtime Snapshots

Photos by
Jerry Gordon



The Swingtime concert on June 9, 2019, at the Wishing Well featured Quinton Cain, Jon Menegon, Rob Lindquist, Dylan Canterbury and Brian Patneaude.

The jam session (below, L-R) included Steve Horowitz's trumpet and Howard Lester on bass. The saxes are all Lee Shaw Scholarship winners: Henry Fernandez (2017), Awan Jenkins (2018) and Kyle Staubi (2019).



live audience ever since.

Teaching occupies many of his daytime hours for the past seven years both at public school and with private bass students. Mike holds a master's degree in music education from Boston University, a bachelor's degree in music education from the College of Saint Rose and certificates from multiple summer programs he attended at Berklee College of Music when he was a teenager.

He has been an active member of the Capital District music scene, performing and/or recording with The Jon Leroy Trio, The Dave Fisk Quartet, Tas Cru, Arc, The Silver Arrow Band, The Tom Healey Band, Charlie Smith Blues Band, Larry Lewis, New Regime, The Karen Lawrence Band, Lil Jay and the Card Sharks, Scotty Mac, Jeff Gonzales, Schenectady Light Opera, The Schenectady Symphony Orchestra, and The Capital Region Wind Ensemble. Recent recording credits include the Joe Finn Trio Plus One *Generational Dynamics* and Tas Cru *Memphis Song*.



***For the area's most up-to-date jazz calendar,
visit aplaceforjazz.org/calendar.htm***

Join Swingtime Jazz Society

The **Swingtime Jazz Society** roster of members has reached 90. You are encouraged to join us by using the coupon on this page.

The Society's mission is to promote quality jazz by employing the finest regional artists for four or five events every year. The format is two hours of concert-cabaret music by the featured artists, followed by a one-hour jam session open to all cats.

All members have a full vote on future attractions and electing officers of the non-profit corporation. We also have a wonderful series of dinner meetings hosted by members. There is a once-only fee of \$100 to join.

See Pages 1, 8 and 9 for our January 12 attraction, the **Dave Fisk Quintet**.

I want to join the Swingtime Jazz Society. Enclosed find my lifetime membership fee of \$100.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Mail to: Colleen Pratt, SJS Treasurer
119 Brian Crest Court
Schenectady, NY 12306-3449

Swingtime Jazz Society

15 Hyland Circle

Troy, NY 12182-1690

518-235-8232

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