

THE BIG BAND THEORY

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that there's only one way to wrap-up a fabulous jazz series, and that's with a big bang. Which is precisely what the Roselawn Jazz Series' did, except they improvised and ended their fourth season with a big bang that was explosive. Roselawn president, James Brennan, opened the concert finale for this year's season by thanking volunteers, sponsors, and jazz series coordinator, Dr. Jazz (a.k.a. David Hurst) – the chairperson of the Roselawn Jazz Series who has been instrumental in putting it together since its inception four years ago – also came on stage to thank the essential people who float the series, and announce the upcoming season line-up which included performers such as Peter Appleyard, the Steve Koven Trio, and the Jambalaya Jazz Band.

The finale to this season, The Swing Shift Big Band, performed a fine selection of some sizzling jazz, I think it's pretty safe to say that this band is fast becoming a favourite for Roselawn jazz patrons. The big band from Ottawa that played for Roselawn Jazz Series in their second season came back with all manners of exuberant sounds and swings. They played a wide range of standard classics – cliché, I know, but there really was something for everyone – and even threw in a few fun musical surprises, such as the quirky Quincy Jones song *Soul Bossa Nova*, that most would recognize as the theme music from Mike Myers' *Austin Powers* mega-movies. The one criterion that bandleader Jim John looks for when choosing a song for the band's repertoire is that the song is well known. It's his theory that no one comes to listen to big bands perform original music – they come for that comfort music of nostalgia. There must be something in this theory, the full-house of jazz series patrons were certainly eating it up.

Swing Shift is formed from 15 instrumentalists, a trio of 3 women singers, introduced as Erica, Catherine and Larissa, are Trio Bella, and a soloist whose speciality is old blue eyes' songs, Dave Statham. The Roselawn stage was packed with musicians – there really wasn't a spare centimeter to be had. As a result, one of the musicians must have bumped the wrong way, and something came crashing to the floor from the trumpet section in the back before the show even began. At the time, John was trying to make an informal type introduction of their band to the audience, but the incident opened up a wave of good-natured ribbing from band members. "What kind of doctor is Dr. Hurst," John asked, barely able to keep from laughing. "If my horn player had been injured (which he wasn't) would Dr. Hurst be able to help?"

Someone from the audience called out, "He's a veterinarian." Everyone had a good laugh, band and audience members alike. It was a good start to a great evening.

Swing Shift Big Band has been playing together for nine years, and has recorded a CD, *The Tradition Continues*, in 2001. Having spoken with John earlier in the week I learned that Swing Shift are in the planning stages of recording a new CD, their debut having been favourably received and played by many jazz stations throughout Canada, including CBC radio.

What will be on the new CD? John hinted that a lot of songs from the Saturday evening line-up were most likely good candidates for the new CD. "One of the secrets of putting out a good CD is rehearsing the music and the best way to rehearse is perform it live." Another good theory – with the added bonus that you can gauge audience reaction to the song's sell-ability.



From left: Swing Shift Big Band leader and alto sax player, Jim John, Roselawn Executive Director, Sue Patterson, Roselawn Jazz Series Chair, David Hurst and Roselawn President, James Brennan. STAFF PHOTOS LYNN PEPPAS

You've got to admit that it's a pretty astute marketing plan but then, Swing Shift is no ordinary big band. But getting to the top has taken a lot of hard work and dedication on all the members' parts. They are a consummate group of individual musicians who, remarkably, all have day jobs as well.

"We're considered semi-professional," John explained his musicians. "This is a very serious hobby for them."

A serious hobby for John too, who has his own wock, plays alto sax and leads the band, and manages the business end of it as well. "The business end of it is very challenging, finding the gigs, landing them, it's all very time consuming and thankless. And because of jobs and family commitments, sometimes everyone can't show up so I've got to find good quality substitutes who can read music flawlessly to fill-in. But we're lucky. Swing Shift is a good band with a good reputation so we can get good musicians to come out and play when we need them."

Still the biggest drawback for big bands that hasn't changed through the years is splitting the paycheck with so many musicians. Playing in a big band comes down to playing for a song. It's dedicating your free time for the love of jazz, and the company of other like-minded musicians.

And perhaps this is why it was such a treat to watch them perform. There's a real sense of camaraderie between band members – which makes them seem even more authentically 'big band.' When breaks occur in a song, and soloing musicians strut their instruments, there was enthusiastic shouts of admiration from band members that spurred the soloists to even greater heights. The music was intoxicating, Trio Bella was crisp and lush in harmonies, and Sinatra dead-ringer, Dave Statham, was fabulously cool and in control of the pacing of songs such as *Come Fly With Me*, and *It Had to Be You*.

If you love jazz, want to learn more about jazz, or simply want a few classy evenings out during the fall and winter season, Roselawn Jazz Series fits the bill for any of those reasons. A reduced subscription rate is available until June 30. For more information phone the box office at 905-834-7572.

THE ARTFUL
FUNDRAISER AT
ARTS PLACE

If you're looking for some amazing art at rock bottom prices the place to be was Arts Place Gallery last Sunday afternoon from 2 to 4 p.m. for their annual silent auction event.

It is the fundraising event that allows the art collective to stay operational for another year in Port Colborne. And there were some amazing finds for relatively little cost to be had.

The three-room shop on King Street with the funky-painted door, was overflowing with art and bargain seekers when I arrived.

You really did need the full two hours to contemplate all the items up for bid for two reasons.

One was the quantity of stuff to view; all three rooms were chock-full of

numerous items. There were paintings and sculptures from members of the collective: Joyce Honsberger, Madeleine Fregren, Diana Hinman, Raymond Martin, Bob Twiddle, Linda Hankin.

There were a series of photograph/digital images from Marsha Wade-Charlebois. There were paintings from art collector, Jean Baird, which had been donated to the auction and included a few bill bisset originals – bisset is that zany, lower-case fusion poet from BC.

There were other items of a less-artful nature, silver egg cup holders, album collections, vases, jewellery (including a couple pair of gorgeous Sazi Dwor earring originals), framed art print posters, pillows, hats, purses, art books.

And apart from the fact that there really was a lot of stuff to look at, it was tight maneuvering and difficult at times to get a good vantage point in some key areas to take it in – but maybe that was part of the fun of it all.

There was a lot of group chatting, artist networking, elbow rubbing, butt bumping, and hip checking (sometimes I think it was intentional from those more serious bidders).

And you were sure to run into people you knew, as I did.

There were lots of artists there, and writers, poets, lots of artsy people in general. So it wasn't a bad crowd to be bumping elbows with.

In fact, schmoozing with others was a good way to kill the time (what an expression), while you kept going back to see if anyone had outbid you yet. There was a lot of hovering, practiced casual glancing (beh, who outbid me on that?), and general circling of favourite auction items.

At a few minutes to four – before bidding was closed – there was a controlled tension on the outside, but all frenzy on the inside, the atmosphere all a part of the silent auction fun.

The really nice thing about the afternoon – and I can quote my girlfriend as saying this because I believe she let her guard down for a second and didn't nix this comment – was that it wasn't all about acquiring more art – it ultimately was to come out and support a good cause.

The sun was shining, the setting was cozy, the deals were terrific, the company was captivating, and the expense was well-justified.

What more could you want from an afternoon out?



Artists Diana Hinman, far right, and Cathy Peters, middle, squaring accounts with a successful bidder at Arts Place Gallery's Annual Silent Auction.