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Dukes of Dixieland

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The Dukes of Dixieland

Sunday, March 3, 2002
3:00 p.m.
THE “ROYALTY OF JAZZ” FROM NEW ORLEANS...

For 3 decades, the DUKES of Dixieland have worn their New Orleans jazz heritage proudly. The oldest continuing jazz band in America’s jazz city has a string of “firsts” behind them, and a sound that’s still fresh — fresh enough to win a Grammy nomination for their jazz-gospel album, “Gloryland,” and praise from Bose® Audio, which selected the DUKES to produce a demonstration album.

Jazz is an American tradition — a tradition celebrated by the DUKES of Dixieland during every performance. The six-member group plays music now blue, now cool, now bright and brassy, always recalling in its jazz rhythms and tones the warm humid languor of the Mississippi River port where it all began — New Orleans.

The DUKES of Dixieland have maintained their preeminent position in their art. Over the years the DUKES have kept their determination to bring their audiences the very heart and soul of New Orleans — authentic Dixieland jazz. Today’s DUKES create that sound as they tour the world, and back in their home city of New Orleans as well. The DUKES make their home on the Steamboat Natchez, playing for nightly cruises on the river when not in concert on the road. Playing together every night has tightened and perfected their sound.

The DUKES have stirred audiences throughout the world. They have shared the stage on tour with Mel Torme, Red Skelton, George Gobel, Pete Fountain, Al Hirt, Woody Herman and scores of other jazz greats. The Dukes also claim the distinction of being one of the few Dixieland jazz ensembles to appear as special guests with numerous symphony orchestras, among them the symphonies of Cleveland, Baltimore, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, The National Symphony, and the New York Pops. Their television credits include an appearance on NBC’s Studs Lonigan mini-series, a 90-minute PBS special The Dukes of Dixieland and Friends, and several guest appearances on TNN’s Nashville Now. The DUKES recorded the theme songs and background music for PBS special The Dukes of Dixieland and Friends, and several guest appearances on TNN’s Nashville Now. The DUKES recorded the theme songs and background music for the national television series Great Chefs of New Orleans, and appeared in a 90-minute special, Woody Herman’s Big Band Celebration.

Today’s DUKES of Dixieland group has a distinctive blend of traditional Dixieland, New Orleans Jazz, and Rhythm ‘n’ Blues, all mixed in with innovative jazz stylings and arrangements. The Dukes preserve such Dixieland favorites as Bourbon Street Parade and South Rampart Street Parade, blend them with cool mellow blues like Basin Street Blues and St. James Infirmary Blues, toss in some hand clapping and toe-tapping ragtime numbers including Scott Joplin’s The Entertainer and Maple Street Rag, and then top it all off with a true New Orleans second line to When The Saints Go Marchin’ In. The result, like jazz itself, is more than the sum of its parts, it’s the music of New Orleans!

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EARL BONIE — Clarinet
Earl Bonie wasn’t born in New Orleans, but he almost made it — by the time he was six months old he was in the Crescent City. When Earl was only 3, he saw one of Leonard Bernstein’s concerts on television. Delighted by the music, he pestered his parents for records, and got an early start to his classics collection with a copy of The Firebird. Earl learned to play in his elementary school band program, taking up the sax in fifth grade. In college he studied jazz at the University of Miami, then returned to New Orleans to play in the city’s famed Blue Room with the Bill Clifford Orchestra. As a Blue Room musician he played for such greats as Ella Fitzgerald, Cleo Laine, and George Shearing. Earl took a year to play with a rock band, and also did a hitch with the Army, playing with the Army Band in Germany. Back in New Orleans since 1991, he has played with the bands aboard the Delta Queen and the American Queen, and with the Storyville Stompers, before starting with the DUKES of Dixieland. Bonie’s warm liquid sound makes “Petite Fleur” a highlight at a Dukes concert.

MIKE FULTON — Trumpet
Mike Fulton lights up with animation as he talks about jazz, describing “the freedom — and the collaboration” he feels with the music. As a child learning the accordion (his mother played), he watched Doc Severinsen on television and wanted to play trumpet. When he was 11, he took up the instrument. His first gig was playing in a sextet for the local Elks Club while he was still in junior high. From then on, there have always been bands in his life. After studying for several years at Central Washington University, he began his career playing on Princess, Carnival, and Royal Caribbean cruise ships in the Caribbean. By his mid-20s, he was back playing the music of Louis Armstrong and Harry James, and played with Bob Snyder at the Grand Hotel in Mackinac Island, Michigan. He moved to American Hawaiian cruises in Hawaii. Then came the chance to play aboard the American Queen steamboat on the Mississippi. Drawing inspiration from the city and its fabled traditions, he felt he had come home. Fulton had always admired the DUKES of Dixieland, and he became friends with members of the group. This led to chances to sit in and play with the Dukes aboard the Steamboat Natchez. And, eventually, to joining the Dukes on trumpet. Now he’s the man out front, adding the bright brass to the Dukes’ sound.

BEN SMITH — Trombone and Vocals
Ben Smith started playing in the streets of New Orleans at the age of nine, and hasn’t stopped since. Ben cut his teeth on jazz, centering his talents on the trombone. He studied music at Loyola University in New Orleans and the University of Minnesota in St. Paul before setting out on a career that has taken him to such places as Disney World and Circus World as well as New Orleans’ own world of fantasy, Bourbon Street. Ben has played all over the United States, Canada, South America, and Japan. And he’s performed with James Brown, Lou Rawls, Doc Severinson, Bob Hope, Dionne Warwick, and The Four Tops, among others. His unique style, combining New Orleans street music, jazz, and blues, was a highlight of the jazz music at Disney World’s “Main Street USA” for ten years. Ben was also the MC for The Famous Door on New Orleans’ Bourbon Street, performing with the New Basin Street Six. Ben’s deep roots in New Orleans music, and his love of Dixieland, make him a natural with the traditional jazz sound of the DUKES of Dixieland. Ben gets a workout on “Wabash Blues,” and has an extra special technique for playing “Twelfth Street Rag.”

SCOTT OBENSCHAIN — Piano
Scott Obenschain studied classical piano starting at the age of four. His grandparents, wanting to hear music from “their era,” encouraged him to listen to their record collection and play “by ear.” Scott fell in love with the music. By the time he was in high school, Scott was playing Dixieland. He played with a group called the St. Clair Street Band — “It was mostly for our own enjoyment, but the other musicians were much more experienced than me and I learned a great deal from them,” he says. In college he continued to work on his art, playing a solo piano job at the Pullman Restaurant in Staunton, Virginia. He graduated from James Madison University with a degree in music. With summer gigs at Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, Virginia, already under his belt, Scott started playing full time. Taking a position on the M.S. Celebration, a cruise ship, he was often in...
EVERETT LINK — Bass
Like many native New Orleans musicians, Everett Link began playing in elementary school. Everett says that he signed up to play because “it was a good way to get out of class.” He began on cello, but eventually developed an infatuation with the string bass. While still in high school, Everett joined as many bands as time would permit. He later turned his energy to rock n’ roll and also to rhythm n’ blues, which led to several commercials and numerous recordings. His introduction to Dixieland music came when he landed a job with the famous Tailgate Ramblers Teagarden. The Ramblers played to standing room only crowds on Bourbon Street, and the experience led Everett to recording sessions, television dates, and nightclub gigs. He later joined the Ronnie Kole Trio, and that association lasted more than 25 years. Everett has performed with such notable artists as Dr. John, Al Hirt, Pete Fountain, Allen Toussaint, and Roberta Sherwood. Watch and listen when Everett teams with Richard Taylor for “Big Noise from Winnetka.”

RICHARD TAYLOR — Drums and Leader
His father thought it was “cute” when Richard Taylor started playing the drums as a child. By the time he was 15, it was more than cute, it was the beginning of a career. Growing up in Chicago, he first heard the DUKES of Dixieland when he was only 14. It was a sound that stayed with him. Out of high school, the self-taught Taylor started his own rock n’ roll band, playing in local nightspots. Rock eventually led to rhythm n’ blues, recordings with Chess Records with the likes of Muddy Waters, and touring throughout the United States. Taylor went on to big band music in Chicago, then started his own blues band. In 1962, Richard hooked up with Ronnie Kole’s band. Two years later he moved to New Orleans to work with Al Hirt. He later rejoined Kole’s band, which led to appearances on The Tonight Show, The Mike Douglas Show, and worldwide travels. Taylor’s recent work is no less impressive. He has backed up Don Rickles, played a television special with Duke Ellington, and worked with Al Hirt and Pete Fountain. He’s been part of many jazz festivals, played with Banu Gibson, Murphy Campo and Connie Jones, and worked all over Las Vegas, abroad to China, and up and down Bourbon Street. Richard’s high-energy drum solos, and his version of “Big Noise from Winnetka,” played with Everett Link, always bring the audience to its feet.

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