



IN THE MOOD

SEPTEMBER 2012

The Olney Big Band
NEWSLETTER

Volume 7, Number 3

Dear Readers:

In 2009, on stage at the historic Olney Theatre Center, the Olney Big Band presented a concert entitled *Swing! Swing!*. It was a celebration of the Swing Era and included a tribute to the King of Swing, Benny Goodman. (It sold out.)

So we did it again – *Swing! II* and *Swing! III*, in 2010 and 2011, were tributes to the big bands that we all know and love (not to brag, but they sold out, too). On September 15, please join us for *Swing! Swing! Swing! IV*, a tribute to Count Basie.

– ITM Editor



www.olneybigband.org

Quarter Notes A DECADE OF SWING

Dr. Rip Rice - Band Leader, Olney Big Band

Most of the famous big band leaders had relatively short careers, from the standpoint of playing for dances (their original purpose) and constantly creating special arrangements of new songs played in the inimitable styles envisioned by the original big band leaders. All too frequently, untimely deaths took the creative band leaders long before their anticipated times – accidents claimed Hal Kemp, Bennie Moten, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Stan Kenton; illness took Jimmy Dorsey, Harry James, and Bunny Berrigan. Others retired from music entirely (Artie Shaw, Charlie Barnet, Larry Clinton), and still others went into studio work or arranging (Les Brown, Billy May).

But there was one fellow who stayed healthy and led a big band for almost 50 years, playing dances and concerts for the people, and ultimately backing Frank Sinatra in Las Vegas performances. This big band stalwart was William (Count) Basie, who would have been 108 years of age this year.

The Olney Big Band believes it to be entirely appropriate that in this, our 10th anniversary year, we honor Count Basie for the many contributions that he and his bands have made over the years to the big band sound. Born in Red Bank, NJ in 1904, he burst into the nation's attention in 1936, playing Kansas City-style jazz – this style of jazz is mostly “head arrangements” based on blues-type riffs, such as *One O’Clock Jump* and *Jumpin’ at the Woodside*. But the Count’s music evolved with the times, constantly swinging, whether the tempos were fast, medium, or slow. And his piano soloing style evolved as well; big band historian Ted Gioia wrote in 1997 that “it was almost as though jazz piano, under Basie’s tutelage, stopped shouting and learned to talk, learned to banter and whisper, at times even hold its tongue in silence that said more than the most high-flown oration.”

There are other stories about the Count in this issue, and he is the primary focus of our upcoming *Swing! Swing! Swing! IV* concert at the Olney Theatre Center on September 15. Happy Birthday, Count!



The Count Basie Story

by DR. RIP RICE

William Basie was born in Red Bank, NJ, on August 21, 1904. An only child, he started out wanting to be a drummer, but switched to piano and in his teens, studied in Harlem with Fats Waller. He made his professional debut as an accompanist for vaudeville acts and replaced Waller in an act called "Katie Crippen and her Kids."

It was while playing piano with the Gonzel White vaudeville show that Basie became stranded in Kansas City when the outfit suddenly broke up. He played at a silent movie house for a while and then became a member of the Walter Page Blue Devils in 1928. This group included Jimmy Rushing, who had happened to hear Basie playing in Kansas City and invited him to attend a Blue Devils performance. Basie soon joined the band after sitting in with them that night.

When the Page band broke up the next year in 1929, Basie, Page, and Rushing all joined Bennie Moten's orchestra, the leading big band in the Southwest.

Basie organized a small band to play at the Reno Club in Kansas City. Scale for the musicians was \$15 a week...

But the band disintegrated when Bennie Moten died far too young in 1935 (from a tonsillectomy gone wrong). So Basie organized



Billie Holiday with Count Basie, June, 1937 (photo by billieholidaysongs.com)

a small band to play at the Reno Club in Kansas City. Scale for the musicians at the club, where beer cost a nickel and whiskey 15 cents, was \$15 a week for playing all seven days -- 8PM to 4AM Sunday to Friday, and Saturdays from 8PM to 8AM.

Nickname

Basie's band did radio broadcasts from the Reno Club. Here's how Basie describes getting his nickname of "Count":

"One night the announcer called me to the microphone for those usual few words of introduction," Mr. Basie once recalled. "He commented that Bill Basie was a rather ordinary name and that there were a couple of well-known bandleaders named Earl Hines and Duke Ellington. Then he said, 'Bill, I think I'll call you Count Basie from now on. Is that all

right with you?' I thought he was kidding, shrugged my shoulders and replied, 'O.K.' Well, that was the last time I was ever introduced as Bill Basie. From then on, it was Count Basie."

Onward and Upward

During one of the Reno Club broadcasts, John Hammond, a wealthy New York City jazz aficionado, heard the group. Hammond had discovered Billie Holiday, and helped Benny Goodman start his band. He spread the word about the Basie band and brought it to the attention of booking agents. As a result, the band got a date at the Grand Terrace in Chicago. The band left Kansas City in the fall of 1936 for the Grand Terrace,

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followed by a date in Buffalo, NY, and finally coming to the Roseland Ballroom in New York City in December of that year.

“I wanted those three trumpets and two trombones to bite with real guts.”

A lot happened during those few months. First, to go on the road, Basie expanded his nine-piece band to 13 pieces. “I wanted my 13-piece band to work together just like those nine pieces,” he once commented. “I wanted 13 men to think and play the same way. I wanted those three trumpets and two trombones to bite with real guts. But I wanted that bite to be just as tasty and subtle as if it were the three brass I used to use. In fact, the only reason I enlarged the brass was to get a richer harmonic structure. I said the minute the brass got out of hand and blared and screeched instead of making every note mean something, there’d be some changes made.”

Second, Basie’s musicians had been playing “head” arrangements in Kansas City, so they only had 12 written arrangements when they arrived at the Grand Terrace. Fletcher Henderson’s band had been playing there just before Basie’s band arrived, and to help them through the Grand Terrace engagement, Henderson lent some of his arrangements to Basie, which was very kind. “He was the only leader in the business who ever went out of his way to help me,” Mr. Basie said later.”

Third, after the Grand Terrace engagement, the band traveled to

New York to play at the Roseland Ballroom. But they were playing opposite Woody Herman’s new, young band, and also, listeners complained that Basie’s band was out of tune. The band was doing the best it could, given that many of the musicians were blowing “patched-up horns and saxophones held together by rubber bands.”

John Hammond, the wealthy jazz fan from New York, hired Willard Alexander as the band’s manager. Finally, Alexander, in an effort to get the band on 52d Street, then the jazz center of New York, made a deal with the Famous Door, “a shoebox of a room, 25 feet wide and about 50 feet long, which was having trouble doing

...having trouble...in the summer because it had no air-conditioning

business in the summer because it had no air-conditioning. Mr. Alexander agreed to lend the club \$2,500 to install an air-conditioner if it would book the Basie band.” The extended engagement at the Famous Door in 1938 finally established the Basie band as a success. That year, Stop Beatin’ Round the Mulberry Bush became a Top Ten hit.

Making Records

In January of 1937, the Count Basie band made its first recording with the Decca record label. The original contract with Decca had the Basie band paid a total of \$750 for 24 sides, with no royalties; commented John Hammond, “[this was] probably the most expensive blunder in Basie’s history.” Those records included many songs now considered jazz classics, including *Jumpin’ at the Woodside*, and *One O’Clock Jump*, which became



Willam “Count” Basie (photo by bio.com)

Basie’s theme song. In 1939, Basie left Decca for Columbia Records.

Basie’s Top Ten hits landed on both the pop charts and the R&B charts: *I Didn’t Know About You* (pop, winter 1945); *Red Bank Blues* (R&B, winter 1945); *Rusty Dusty Blues* (R&B, spring 1945); *Jimmy’s Blues* (pop and R&B, summer/fall 1945); and *Blue Skies* (pop, summer 1946). In 1947, Basie switched to RCA Victor Records, and stayed on the top of the charts with *Open the Door, Richard!*, *Free Eats, One O’Clock Boogie*, and *I Ain’t Mad at You (You Ain’t Mad at Me)*.

Although often nominated for Grammys and other awards, Basie wanted his albums to do better. So in 1962, he switched to Frank Sinatra’s Reprise Records, and in 1963 won a Grammy for Best Performance by an Orchestra for *Dancing with Basie! Hits of the 50’s and 60’s*. Basie’s final Grammy Award, his ninth, was in 1984 for *88 Basie Street*. (Many books and articles list all of Basie’s awards throughout his long career).

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Count Basie's health began deteriorating in 1976 after a heart attack that kept him from performing for about six months, although the band continued playing dates during his absence. He had another hospital stay in 1981, and after he recovered, rode out on the stage on a motorized wheelchair, which he "sometimes drove with joyful abandon." In 1984, Basie died of cancer at the age of 79.

Basie the Leader

Basie's obituary in the *New York Times* included a wonderful

He flicked out tightly economical, single-finger passages, directing his musicians with a glance, a lift of an eyebrow or a note hit gently but positively in passing.

description of his style of leadership: "Mr. Basie, a short, stocky, taciturn but witty man who liked to wear a yachting cap offstage, presided over the band at the piano with apparent utmost casualness. He flicked out tightly economical, single-finger passages, directing his musicians with a glance, a lift of an eyebrow or a note hit gently but positively in passing.

Unostentatious as Mr. Basie appeared, his presence was a vital factor in directing his band or any group of musicians with whom he might be playing. There was a memorable concert...when a number of musicians...were

scheduled to perform in a variety of combinations.

A group that included some Basie sidemen was on stage, playing in a ragged, desultory fashion, when Mr. Basie arrived. The pianist in the combo gave up his seat to Mr. Basie who sat down, tinkled a few introductory notes, looked up at the drummer, nodded at the rest of the group and, when the combo took off, the musicians were playing as brilliantly and cleanly as they had been disheveled only a few moments before.

[Stay tuned for more stories about Count Basie's bands, in the next issue of *In the Mood*.]

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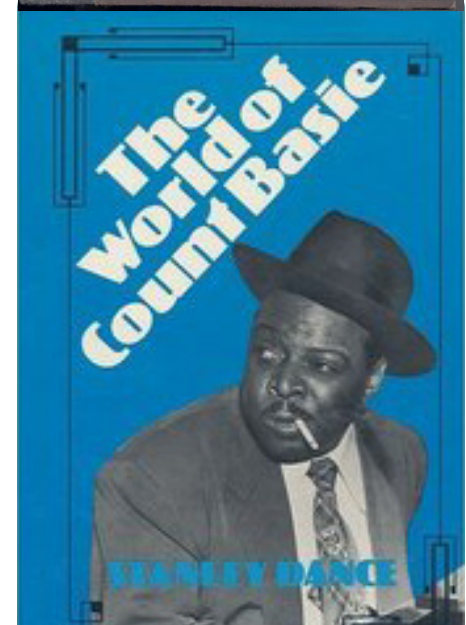
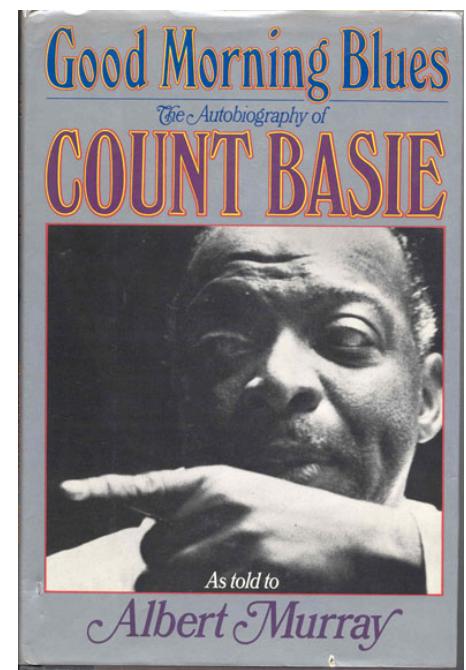
Wilson, John S. *New York Times on the Web*, Learning Network, On This Day. "Count Basie, 79, Band Leader And Master of Swing, Dead." April 27, 1984. <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0821.html>/ Accessed 8/15/2012.

Did You Know?

In 1981, Count Basie was honored

as a recipient of the prestigious Kennedy Center Honor for Achievement in the Performing Arts. Joining him to receive this auspicious awards were fellow honorees: Cary Grant, Helen Hayes, Jerome Robbins and Rudolf Serkin. Quite a class of icons indeed.

Basie returned to Kansas City in September of 1983 to celebrate his 79th birthday and to reunite with some of the great jazz artists, who played with him in a concert at Crown Center Square. □



Player Spotlight: Michael Arrington

by DR. SUE VAZAKAS

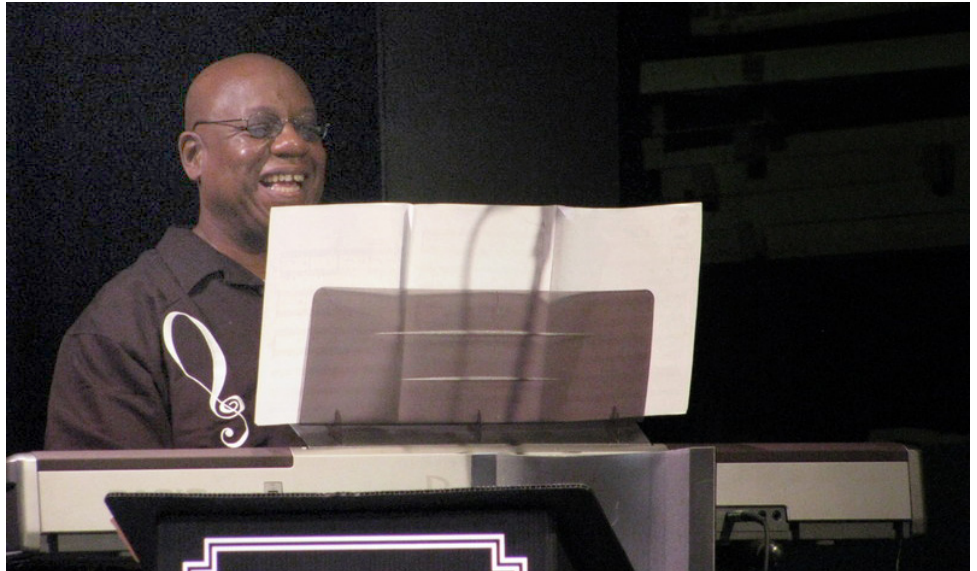
Swing! Swing! Swing! IV is a tribute to Count Basie's wonderful music. Basie himself can't be with us, however, so who will be sitting in for him on the piano?

Meet Michael Arrington, who began playing the piano at age 7 and trumpet at age 11, while a student in the Prince George's County public schools. Michael, a native of Seat Pleasant, MD, got his Bachelor of Music degree from The Catholic University of America. He had marvelous teachers there, including Dr. David Flowers for trumpet, Dr. Walter Pate for piano, Martin Picuch for jazz and woodwinds, and for conducting, Dr. Robert Garafalo and the great Frederick Fennell.

"hold it until the concert master runs out of bow"

(There are countless Fennell stories, but one of Michael's favorites is the Fennell decision concerning the playing of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. History isn't clear about how long to hold the fourth note of the iconic four-note beginning – how many beats is that last note in "dum dum duh daaaaaaaah"? Fennell's answer: hold it until the concert master runs out of bow.)

Upon graduating, Michael became a conductor for the New Music Orchestra, an ensemble



Michael Arrington tickles the ivories during the Swing III concert in August, 2011

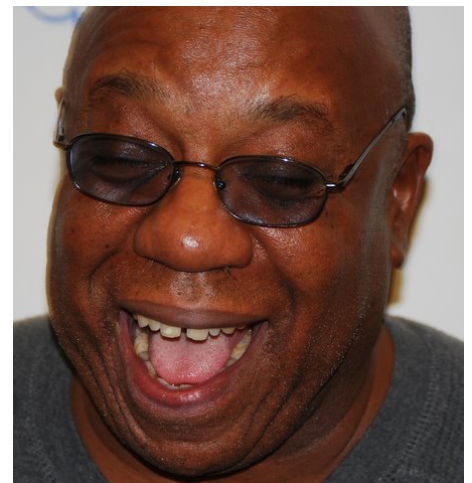
that specialized in world and national premieres and works by local composers. At the same time, he continued his career as a church pianist, and has served as choral director and organist for several denominations and congregations throughout D.C. and Maryland.

In 2004 Michael won a scholarship from the Potomac Organ Institute and studied classical organ there with Dr. Dale Krider.

Michael has been a member of many professional and amateur ensembles. Notable experiences include playing piano with the Potomac Trio, playing a 19th-century cornet with Heritage Americana, musical director of several cable television shows, conducting 150-voice choirs at the National Presbyterian church in D.C., and enjoying the occasional cocktail/piano bar gig around the D.C. area.

The Olney Big Band became acquainted with Michael in 2010,

when Bruce Morris, OBB trumpeter and fellow trumpeter with Michael in the Rockville Concert Band, mentioned that the OBB was looking for a piano player. Now an integral part of our rhythm section, Michael especially loves playing dances and having the opportunity to see the variety of talented dancers who waltz, cha-cha, rhumba, foxtrot, line dance, samba, and gloriously celebrate swing music. □



What Is Kansas City Jazz?

by DR. RIP RICE

In the late 1930s, Kansas City's nickname was "the Paris of the [American] Plains" because it was home to more nightclubs, gambling dens, and other legal and illegal hangouts than you could count. The clubs never closed, the liquor laws were ignored, and the local political boss not only didn't care, but profited from it all. Big band musicians would play their regular gigs, then hit the jazz clubs to jam until morning. Music, as well as sin, flourished.

The numerous theaters and saloons in town provided work to many musicians, and music stores multiplied. Soon, some of those stores, which sold phonographs, sheet music, and instruments, evolved into music publishers. However, during those times, musicians' unions were still divided by color, and neither radio nor the recording industry would feature bands of African-American musicians. But when the "jazz craze" began in the '20s, black musicians such as Fletcher Henderson, Louis Armstrong, and Jelly Roll Morton, and bands such as King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band started gaining fans.

Although the first band from Kansas City to acquire a national reputation was a white group -- the Coon-Sanders Original Nighthawk Orchestra (named for Carleton Coon and Joe Sanders) -- the Kansas City jazz "school" became identified with the black bands of the 1920s and 1930s.

Kansas City Jazz marked the transition from the structured big band style to the musical improvisation style of Bebop. Three main elements of Kansas City Jazz are "sections riffing in counterpoint, punctuated by solos and anchored by the steady



Charlie "Bird" Parker and Miles Davis are products of the Kansas City Jazz scene. (photo by the Smithsonian Institute)

pulse of the rhythm section..." Also, KC big bands often played by memory -- so-called "head arrangements" -- instead of reading charts, as other big bands did. "Basically [musicians] took the blues uptown and jumped it...which produced first swing and later bebop."

Dave Dexter was a journalist who reported on the local music scene for the *Kansas City Star*, *Down Beat*, and other publications. But eventually he began working for Decca Records. His liner notes from the historic album entitled *Kansas City Jazz* (1941) laid out why KC jazz was the best: "...Kansas City style jazz is Southwestern jazz. All the bands from the west of the Mississippi River... play somewhat alike, stressing beat, piano solos, riffing by the saxes, and always coordinated together! The early New Orleans bands never used a piano. Or a saxophone. And instead of organized jamming, the idea seemed

to be all 'bash' together, and have the solos clash. ...Chicago style also is more disorganized... Neither Chicago nor New Orleans jazz particularly stresses a beat, which every musician...considers a vital part of le [jazz] hot."

A tourist web site for KC ("Experience Kansas City"), sums it up: "While New Orleans was the birthplace of jazz, America's music grew up in Kansas City."

Driggs, F. and Haddix, C. *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop—A History*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Kansas City Jazz. Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas_City_jazz [accessed 8/25/2012]

Kansas City Has the Blues and All that Jazz. <http://www.experiencekc.com/blue-sandjazz.html> [accessed 8/26/2012]

This Date in OBB History

Where Were You When?

by DR. SUE VAZAKAS

August 2005

The week of August 8-14 will live forever in our minds as “Marathon Week.”

Monday the 9th saw our usual weekly rehearsal, with one difference: we were rehearsing for four gigs. Yes, four: Sunday the 14th would be our regular Second Sunday Brunch gig at the Sandy Spring Firehouse ballroom. Also, the Gaithersburg Senior Center had invited us to play for them on Wednesday the 11th.

But then the Olney Theatre Center called – could we play at the Grand Opening of their new Mainstage Theater on Friday, August 12? Sure, we’d love to; the OBB is a big fan of the OTC. Then came another call: Grand Opening on Friday the 12th was sold out; could we also play at a second night of celebration on Saturday the 13th?

So Marathon Week consisted of Monday rehearsal, Wednesday in Gaithersburg, Friday and Saturday nights in Olney, and Sunday morning in Sandy Spring. That week in 2005 still holds the record as our most action-packed!

August 2006

This month saw big changes for the band, including the change of our name from Olney Jazz Troupe to Olney Big Band, and the appearance of the first issue of our brand new newsletter, *In the Mood*. The idea for the newsletter came from our own Judge Bob Redding, whose extraordinary life was chronicled in the newsletter’s December 2011 issue (http://www.olneybigband.org/newsletter_pdfs/ITM_DEC_2011_-FINAL.pdf)

September 2006

“A cool, crisp fall evening, a crescent moon rising on the flow of an orange sunset,... the smiles of residents and

staff savoring the smooth sounds of the Olney Big Band... it doesn’t get any better than that!” PR Director Lynelle Smith beautifully described our concert at the Brooke Grove Retirement Village in Sandy Spring, one of our favorite venues and not coincidentally the home of Dr. and Mrs. Rip Rice.

August 2007

The OBB is certified as the first ever “Ambassadors of Big Band Music.” The certificate, from the Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame was presented by musician, band leader, and arranger Ben Grisafi. It was a beautiful night in Olney Town Center, and the sizeable crowd was treated to Ben’s beautiful rendition of *Talk of the Town*, as well as Ben and Rip Rice “trading 4’s” in *C-Jam Blues*. It was a night to remember. (Read more and see photos in this special edition: http://www.olneybigband.org/newsletter_pdfs/SpecialEdition_eFile.pdf.)



The Olney Big Band performs at the Grand Opening of the Olney Theatre Center

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Ben Grisafi presents Rip Rice with very first certification as Ambassadors of Big Band Music

September 2007

The band had its first visit to the Gaithersburg Festival in Olde Town. Our group's appearance was kindly sponsored by the Mid-Atlantic Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. We received a wonderful thank-you note from President and CEO, Dr. Jorge Ribas, who said, "Your music brings a lift to spirits [and] entices our feet to move..."

July 2009

The band traveled to its first international event: the 42nd

Annual Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. The stunning beauty of the Geneva area, where the band members and their families stayed, was ever-present during our travels around the area, usually by the convenient local train – the towns of Vevey, Lausanne, and the vibrant city of Geneva were colorful and fascinating. Our performances on one of the outdoor stages were great fun and appreciated by the large crowd on the lawn, while just behind it, visitors from all over the world strolled among numerous vendors along the bank of gorgeous Lake Geneva.



A banner marks the walk along Lake Geneva shoreline at the Montreux Jazz Festival

Basie Bits

by DR. RIP RICE

Here are a few additional tidbits about Count Basie:

"One of the most singular keyboardists in the history of jazz, Basie refined a sparser, more open sounding approach than any of his predecessors. It was almost as though jazz piano, under Basie's tutelage, stopped shouting and learned to talk, learned to banter and whisper, at times even hold its tongue in silence that said more than the most high-flown oration. One of the many delights of his music came from hearing how he could do so much with so little. Incisive, robust, energized -- the ends achieved seemed at odds with the meager means employed. Some have been tempted to dismiss Basie as a mere tinkler of the ivories, more noteworthy for his band than for his skills as a player. Yet for Basie, a mere tinkle, a simple fill, or the hint of a vamp was rich with implication."

The Last of the Blue Devils (1979) is a documentary starring Basie and featuring many performers from the original era. It's still available on DVD.

"This documentary takes an in-depth look inside the world of Kansas City blues and jazz music, a scene anchored by some of the genre's all-time greats, including Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Ernie Williams, and Dizzy Gillespie. Interviews with some of these legendary musicians, along with rare archival footage, reveal fascinating details about the lives of these artists, their personalities, and the history behind their much-revered sound."

Gioia, Ted (1997), *The History of Jazz*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, pp. 163-164

Key Personnel

Band Leader: Dr. Rip G. Rice
Music Director: Dr. Bob Tennyson
Business Manager: David B. Schumer
Sound Engineer: Paul Freirich
Band Historian/Archivist: VACANT

Board of Directors

Dr. Rip G. Rice, President
Brad Bawek, Vice President, Design and Publishing
Paul Freirich
Tom Harwick
Bruce Morris
David B. Schumer, Band Manager/Treasurer
Liz Schwendenmann, Recording Secretary
Halsey Smith
Richard Sonnenschein
Dr. Bob Tennyson

In The Mood

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Friends of the OBB

The Friends of the Olney Big Band support the efforts of the Band by encouraging volunteerism and by donating and soliciting and receiving gifts, bequests and endowments for the Band. If you are interested in becoming a *Friend of the Olney Big Band* go to the OBB website and click *Friends of the OBB* for details.

Benefactors:

- Barry and Ali Fell

Arrangers:

- Brooke Grove Retirement Village
Sandy Spring Friends School

Side Men:

- American Legion Norman Price Post 68, Roger Aldridge,
Dr. Charles C. Chen, Flaming Pit Restaurant Gaithersburg,
Globetrotter Travel Services of Olney, Graeves Auto and Appliance,
Helen Kinney, Mamma Lucia Restaurant Olney, Montgomery
General Hospital, Doran and Kevin McMahon, Rose Redding Mersky,
Rocketteria of Olney, Alan Rich/Nova Label Co., Sandy Spring
Lions Club, Halsey W. Smith, Studio of Ballet Arts,
Dolores and Gary Wilkinson

Donors:

- Vera Bailey, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Cantril, Jane Danahy, El Andariego
Restaurant, Deb and Paul Fitzer, Fletcher's Service Center of Olney,
Arabelle Kossiakoff, Crystal U. Lee, Mizell Music, Glenn and Nancy
Ochsenreiter, Olney Toys, Charles A. Rubio Jr., Sandy Spring Bank,
Robert E. Traut, Dolores and Gary Wilkinson,
Charles and Elsbeth Woodward

Honorary Friends:

- Joe Karam & Robert Redding (in memoriam), Barry Schwartz

OBB Events Schedule

Saturday, September 15, 2012 -

Swing!Swing!Swing! IV. Olney Theatre Center, Olney MD, 1:30pm - 4:00pm. Reserved tickets may be purchased at the Olney Theatre Box Office, Monday-Friday 10am-6pm, and Saturdays and Sundays 12-5pm, online at www.olneytheatre.org under Special Events, or by calling 301.924.3400. Open to the Public.

Sunday, October 7, 2012 -

Brooke Grove Swings, 2:00pm - 4:00pm. Brooke Grove Retirement Village, 18100 Slade School Road, Sandy Spring, MD. Open to the public.

Saturday, October 20, 2012 -

Capital Cotillion Ballroom Dance Group 50th Anniversary Party, Sheraton Premiere at Tysons Corner. Closed to the public.

Monday, December 10, 2012 -

Annual Festival of Lights Concert, 9900 Stoneybrook Drive Kensington, Maryland 20895, The first concert will be at 7 PM and the second at 8 PM. Open to the public.

Don't forget to visit us on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/OLNEY-BIG-BAND/185013624074>

"You may think you're the boss, but that drummer is really the head man."

- Count Basie

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