



# IN THE MOOD

The Olney Big Band  
NEWSLETTER

JULY 2007

Volume 2, Number 3

## Dear Members:

Welcome to the fifth edition of The Olney Big Band Newsletter. Our schedule this summer is proving to be a real barn burner, but there's nothing like swinging music to pass the lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer. Be sure to check the back page for a complete list of our upcoming performances.

NOTE: We need photos for our Mystery Player Corner. Please send your submittals to [bbawek@comcast.net](mailto:bbawek@comcast.net)

## Special Dates:

### Gigs:

Jul 8, 28  
Aug 2, 4,  
12: am & pm  
Sep 9, 16

### Rehearsals:

Jul 2, 16, 30  
Aug 6, 20  
Sep 10, 24

[www.olneyjazz.org](http://www.olneyjazz.org)

## Quarter Notes – Musings Of A Band Leader

Dr. Rip G. Rice - Music Director, Olney Big Band

In the September of my years, I am struck by many things. Technological dreams of my youth that became real applications that are now part of my everyday life. When I was young, the big band and combo jazz music I listened to was recorded on 10-inch Bakelite (plastic) 78 rpm “records”. There were only two musical numbers on such records, one on each side. And each side held only three minutes of music. Ever wonder why most big band numbers are only three minutes long? The Bakelite 10-inchers are the reason. Those Bakelite records only lasted for a few hundred plays – primarily because the quality of the record player needles was not the greatest, and because the records were easily broken. When I broke my first copy of String of Pearls, I remember canvassing several record stores to finally find the “last copy” for my collection.

Today we've got CDs and DVDs. I've come to understand CDs by now, and I'm working hard at understanding DVDs. I can get more than an hour's worth of music on a single CD. That's the equivalent of 10-11 Bakelite recordings. When I was 16-18 (in 1940-42), Bakelites cost 75 cents each. Ten cost \$7.50. Today I can get some CDs at that same price. If one considers inflation, we've got some REALLY good bargains today.

A number of other items strike me as pretty wonderful as well. Primarily the joy of being able to bring to audiences of my generation, live, through the Olney Big Band, the music of their youth – played as they remember it. The music they grew up with. At a recent concert at Brooke Grove Retirement Village in Sandy Spring, Maryland, we were playing to an audience of my peers. While directing Glenn Miller's Moonlight Serenade I began tearing up – the Miller sound (clarinet lead over four saxes, all in the same octave) was so beautiful. Just then, I felt a pat on the back and a voice said, “Thanks pal”. I turned around, but no one was there. Maybe Glenn's spirit?

But I am also struck by the number of younger generation folks that like the music we play – the music of the Big Band Era. Most players in the Olney Big Band are younger than I – all the way down to our 17-year old pride and joy, Alexander Leishman, still a high school student, and trombone player par excellence. With young talent like this enjoying playing our kind of music, the future of big band music is assured.

Recently, I caught one of those internet messages. A grandson asks, “How old are you



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grandpa?”, and grandpa lists all the things he remembered from his youth. One item caught my attention, “And I never heard of anyone blowing his brains out after listening to Tommy Dorsey!” If you are a musician of my age, that statement carries a double entendre. When I was young, and had just become somewhat proficient with my saxophone, “blowing your brains out” meant picking up your horn, finding a few other hep cats, starting a jam session, and blowing your brains out. And all it took was listening to some current records of the big bands, or the local radio disc jockey to get such a “brain blowing out” jam session started. Too bad there is another, much more tragic, meaning today.

In this issue of In the Mood, you will find two stories about another big band musician, Ben Grisafi. Ben’s history is a little like mine – we both played in bands when young (did you know that Alan Greenspan played saxophone with Ozzie Nelson’s orchestra before WW-II?), married a wonderful lady, quit music, raised a family, became a jeweler (I became a chemist), then in later years returned to music. Ben not only is a great tenor sax player, but he also arranges music. The Olney Big Band plays several of Mr. Grisafi’s charts, always with great pleasure. Be sure to read these stories about Ben Grisafi – and thanks for listening.

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## I AM AN AMERICAN

The U.S. Air Force Concert Band has published a dozen CD renditions of patriotic music. This musical collection celebrates our nation’s foundation of liberty and democracy. One of these compositions is entitled “I Am An American.” This seven-minute rendition was created by American composer, Carmen Dragon, and was first introduced to an audience in the historic Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.

It accompanies the following winning Voice of Democracy essay, the words of Elizabeth Ellen Evans:

I am an American.

Listen to my words, listen well.

For my country is a strong country.

And my message is a strong message

I am an American.

And my heritage is of the land and

Of the spirit, of the heart, and of the soul.

I am an American.

I speak for Democracy, and the dignity of the individual.

You can hear this patriotic treasure, performed by the U.S. Air Force Concert Band and the Singing Sergeants. It was arranged by my Masonic friend, Floyd Werle, chief arranger for these superb musicians from 1952 to 1982.

## Tin Pan Alley

“Tin Pan Alley” was the nickname given to the street where many music publishers worked during the period of 1880 to 1953. In the late 19th century, New York had become the epicenter of song-writing and music publishing, and publishers converged on the block of West 28th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue in Manhattan. There are several stories about how the block got its name. One that is often repeated tells of a reporter for the New York Herald who was hired to write about the new business of sheet music publishing in the city. As he walked down 28th Street toward the publishing offices, he heard the dissonant chords and strings of competing pianos through the open windows. The sound, he remarked, sounded like a bunch of tin pans clanging.

During the period before Elvis Presley made a song’s performance more important than its publication—when a song’s popularity was determined not by the number of records it sold but by the number of sheet music copies it sold—publishing com-

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- Robert Redding

## Player Spotlight Mr. Walt Frasier

I started out playing the violin in 4th grade but unfortunately, or fortunately for the Olney Big Band, my high school did not have an orchestra. So when I got to the ninth grade an uncle, who played with the Coast Guard bands in New York City during World War II and loved Big Band music, gave me an old trombone he had in his attic. The high school I attended did not provide for music lessons either. But I was determined to play. On my own I learned about the bass clef and the seven positions of the trombone. I even wrote the positions on top of the notes for a few years and to this day I have never had a trombone lesson.

In 1962 I learned to play a baritone bugle and performed with the Woodsiders Drum and Bugle Corps of Newark, N.J. Our theme that year was “big band”. The Olney Big Band plays a number called “Jungle Drums”, which I had not heard in 44 years.

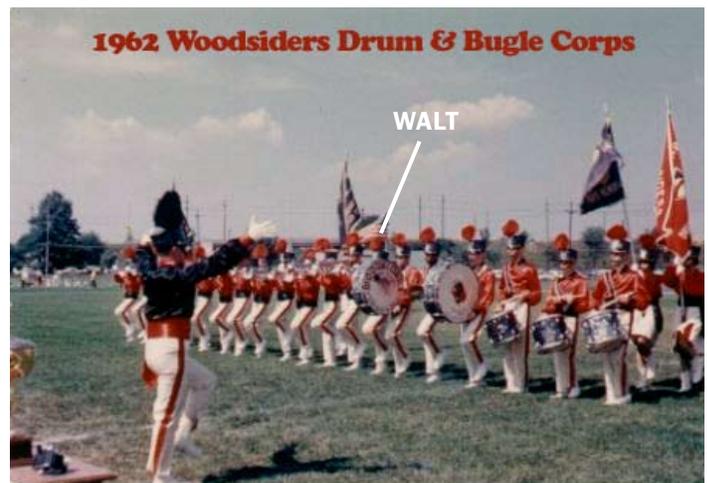
When I attended Villanova they had a small band and enough trombones so I decided to try my hand at the cornet. One of my uncle’s sons had a trumpet and he taught me the fingerings, but no formal training here either. One marching season at Villanova I tried the sousaphone, but I could not get used to the large mouthpiece and the bass clef fingering. I marched up and down the field, horn swinging nicely, but not much was coming out of it.

When I got married in 1970 my wife (intentionally, I think) picked an apartment that was not near any organized band. It was not until 1976 that I began playing trombone again and this is only because my wife gave me one for Christmas. Guess she loved me after all. I had no lip and had forgotten the positions but nevertheless, I joined the Browningsville Cornet Band (BCB). A few years later, when one of the first trombonists took a leave of absence to recuperate from a finger he had severed while slaughtering hogs, I was moved up to first trombone. This encouraged me to practice more than I ever had before, so much so that my wife kept reminding me that I was married and had three small children. In 1987, the BCB needed a director. I took an evening conducting course at Montgomery College the year before and managed to lead the band for 13 years. This band has been in continuous existence since 1884, and I was its 11th director. I still play with BCB when I can.

Other important bands that I have played with over the years include: Montgomery Village Band; the Village Jazz Band, and the Rockville Concert Band. I have a degree in mathematics and I am an actuary and a software developer at my day gig. But my other love is being on the water. I bought a small sailboat in 1993, graduated to a 30’ Catalina, and, for the last five summers I have had a 46’ powerboat. Go to band or go boating, this is what I am often trying to decide during good weather.



Walt takes a solo at the Sunday Brunch.



Walt will never forget this performance, because the drummer used an all wooden mallet that hit his left elbow several times during the performance - and it hurt! Maybe that’s why Walt so fondly recalls “Jungle Drums”.

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panies hired composers and lyricists on a permanent basis to create popular songs. The publishers then used extensive promotion campaigns to market these songs to the general public in sheet music form.

Never in the history of American popular music were so many genres centered in one area. Through the 1880s and into the early 1900s, the European operettas were a heavy influence on American songs. This period is referred to as the golden age of the ballad. Between 1900 and 1910, more than 1800 “rags” had been published on Tin Pan Alley, beginning with “Maple Leaf Rag” by Scott Joplin. In 1912, W.C. Handy introduced popular music to the underground sound of the Blues. By 1917, a recording by a new musician, Louis Armstrong, took over Tin Pan Alley and the 1920s were dedicated to the playing and recording of Jazz. Theatre, which had remained the entertainment of choice, fused all preceding stage shows—minstrel, vaudeville, musical comedy, revues, burlesque and variety—to create the spectacular Broadway production. By 1926, the first movie with sound came creating a new outlet for production music. Folk and Country Music was introduced to mainstream audiences in the mid-1930s. Big bands and swing music defined the 1930s and 40s, introducing new accompanying vocalists such as Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. In the early 40s, publishers imported Latin American sound from Brazil, Mexico and Cuba and English lyrics were adapted to foreign themes.

At the close of World War II, instrumental big bands faded behind the popularity of vocal groups and the new modern sound called “be-bop”.

In the beginning of the 1950s, radio play and disc jockeys became more prominent, and records were being produced for sale to the public—mostly targeted toward teenagers—rather than sheet music created for adults who bought music for their home. Publishers were no longer in charge of the promotion of a song, and from 1953 to the present, rock and roll dominated the charts.

The collaboration between publishers, songwriters and songwriting teams created the greatest popular songs of our country’s musical history. While obsolete now, Tin Pan Alley remains synonymous with the most prolific and diverse period in American popular music.

Courtesy: Songwriters Hall of Fame

## Olney Big Band’s Mystery Player Corner

This cartoon depicts one of our members showing off his chops at an early age. Can you guess which of our esteemed members this is? (answer on page 6)



## Ben Grisafi Sentimental Journey

Ben Grisafi first picked up a tenor saxophone at the age of 13 and has since penned over 100 big band arrangements. Growing up listening to the music from the big bands and their major soloists - - and especially influenced by Charlie Ventura, Coleman Hawkins, and Lester Young - - Grisafi’s long career had its genesis in the 1940s as he sat in sections of bands led by Randy Brooks and Billy Butterfield. Defying the extensive odds against being successful, Ben Grisafi put together a 19-piece big band in 1993. Working out of Baldwin, Long Island, Grisafi had a veritable goldmine of players to choose from, many of them veterans of the big band era, having played with such towers of those times as Harry James, Glenn Miller, the Dorsey Brothers, Stan Kenton, and Billy May, to name just a few. Maybe a bit long in the tooth, these veterans of the big bands seemingly have lost neither their ability nor their desire to swing as their work with Grisafi has conclusively exhibited. Since its inception, his group put together four

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Grisafi from page 4

successful CDs, starting with Talk of the Town in 1993 through Say You'll Always Remember, released in 2001. The success of these CDs indicates a strong residue of support for big band swing in New York and other large cities. The band uses a huge book, put together by Grisafi, which features the leader's fresh arrangements of songs that helped make the swing era one of the most flourishing periods of popular music in America's history. When he is not working, Grisafi likes to listen to Phil Woods, Rob McConnell & the Boss Brass, Count Basie, and Les Brown. It's the Brown sound that the Grisafi aggregation most closely resembles.

Ben Grisafi eventually moved to West Palm Beach, FL and in 2005, was named Musical Director of The Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame. The band is comprised of the finest musicians in South Florida, and the group performs at its annual gala to coincide with the opening of the South Florida Fair in January.

"The Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame is an attractive and valid presentation of the great personalities of the Big Band era," says Grisafi. "The purpose is to establish a Museum to commemorate the famous Big Bands, vocalists, composers and their all-American popular music. Beside exhibits and walls of photos, there will be lectures, a souvenir shop and a library of materials, books and memorabilia. Among the artifacts are instruments, band stands and clothing apparel. We wish to continue to promote and feature Big Band music on radio and television stations throughout the United States. We want to get to the high schools and educate. The Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame museum will be an integral commemorative part of the American music culture. I will try to help perpetuate the legacy of Big Bands."

## Sally Bennett "Big Band" Hall of Fame Museum

The late Sally Bennett was the founder of the Big Band Hall of Fame that first began in Cleveland, Ohio and was later housed on Fern Street in the historic Palm Beach Community College building. In recent years, the artifacts have taken residence in the Bink Glisson Historical Museum in Yesteryear Village on the South Florida Fairgrounds.

The Museum commemorates the famous Big Bands, Vocalists, Composers and their All-American Popular Music.

Displays of memorabilia includes Tommy Dorsey, Buddy Rich, Glenn Miller, Sammy Kaye, Benny Goodman, Harry James, Duke Ellington, Guy Lombardo and many more.

The Big Band era began as early as 1912, was known as "Sweet Music" and was being played at such places as the Ziegfield Roof in New York.

By the early twenties many groups were playing across the country including Art Hickman, Frank Ellis, Paul Whiteman, The Dorseys, Duke Ellington, and Guy Lombardo.

By definition Big Band is a band that is ten pieces and that usually features a mixture of ensemble

playing and solo improvisation typical of jazz or swing, however Big Band is so much more! Come and discover the rich history of the Big Band Era at the Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame Museum.

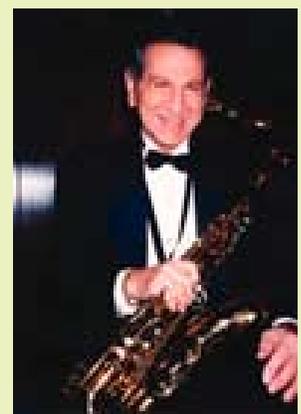
Yesteryear Village is on the South Florida Fairgrounds in suburban West Palm Beach off Southern Boulevard 1.5 miles west of the Florida Turnpike. If you are interested in supporting The Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame, the Fairgrounds is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization and is amenable to tax deductible charitable contributions. For additional information, contact Elizabeth Speigle, Yesteryear Village Curator, at (561) 795-3110 or via email: [elizabeth@southfloridafair.com](mailto:elizabeth@southfloridafair.com).



Courtesy: Big Band Hall of Fame Homepage

Please Note:

Ben Grisafi will be a Guest Performer with the OBB during the Aug 2 Concert in the Olney Town Center.



## Key Personnel

Music Director: Dr. Rip G. Rice  
Asst. Music Director: Dennis Johnson  
Business Manager: David B. Schumer

## Officers

Dr. Rip G. Rice, President  
Robert Redding, VP for Public Relations  
David B. Schumer, Secretary/Treasurer

## Board of Directors

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**THE OLNEY  
BIG BAND**



**IN THE MOOD**  
Editor: Brad Bawek  
Contributing Editor: Robert Redding  
Send newsletter submissions to: [bbawek@comcast.net](mailto:bbawek@comcast.net)

## OBB Events Schedule

Sunday, July 8 - The Oak Room , Sandy Spring Firehouse, Dance and Brunch, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.\*

Saturday, July 28 - The City Hall Concert Pavillion, Gaithersburg, MD, 7 to 9 p.m.

Thursday, August 2 - Olney Town Center, Olney, MD, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Saturday, August 4 - Private Party, The Oak Room, Sandy Spring Firehouse, Sandy Spring, MD, 5 to 7:30 p.m.\*\*

Sunday, August 12 - The Oak Room, Sandy Spring Firehouse, Dance and Brunch, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.\*

Sunday, August 12 - Heartlands Senior Living Village, 3804 Northridge Road, Ellicott City, MD, 6 to 7 p.m.

Sunday, Sept. 9 - The Oak Room, Sandy Spring Firehouse, Dance and Brunch, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.\*

Sunday, September 16 - Old Towne Festival, Gaithersburg, MD, Noon to 2 p.m.

### REHEARSALS

Mondays  
Jul 2, 16, 30 – Aug 6, 20 – Sep 10, 24  
*All full band rehearsals*

\* The Oak Room at Sandy Spring:  
<http://www.ssbballroom.com/>

\*\* Closed to Public

### OBB Mystery Player from page 4

That's Rich Sonnenschein reinforcing the familial bonds.

### For Band Information Contact

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