



IN THE MOOD

The Olney Big Band
NEWSLETTER

JULY 2012

Volume 7, Number 2

Dear Readers:

The wonderful summer music season is here again, and the OBB would like to invite you to some very special events.

In August, we will play our first Eastern Shore concert, in historic Denton, as part of Caroline County's "Summerfest" series of concerts. And in September, please join us for *Swing, Swing, Swing IV*.

Above all, don't miss the first American concert by the Prutz Town Band at the Olney Theatre Center, July 14 at 3pm. These musicians from Austria put on a marvelous show.

- ITM Editor



www.olneybigband.org

Quarter Notes A DECADE OF SWING

Dr. Rip Rice - Band Leader, Olney Big Band

It seems like only yesterday that the Olney Jazz Troupe (now the Olney Big Band) was organized. But no -- it was back in 2002. We started as an outgrowth of the Olney Community Band (now the Olney Concert Band), and we rehearsed for a scant 30 minutes each week, just after the OCB rehearsal at Sherwood High School. I wasn't even around this band at that time; I was called in during the following year.

When I did face this august group of (mostly) classically trained musicians, I saw five saxes, two or three trombones, two or three trumpets, piano, electric bass, and drums, with no guitar and no vocalists. Most of the folks wanted to learn how to play swing music, but only a few had any experience playing in a swing band.

After a few months, about a quarter of the musicians left the band, agreeing with me that playing swing music was actually more difficult than playing classical music or classical band repertoire.

Our first big break came when Barry Schwartz (the at-that-time owner of B.J. Pumpnickel's restaurant in Olney) asked us to play for the monthly Second Sunday brunches at the Sandy Spring Ballroom (above the Sandy Spring Volunteer Fire Department), which we did for three years. (You'll read more about Barry and how important he was to the band in a future issue).

During this decade, we've played at many memorable venues over the years. They've included local retirement communities, the Strathmore Arts Center, various ballrooms and hotels for receptions and brunches, an outdoor park for a wedding, high schools and churches, Blues Alley, the Black Rock Arts Center, many locations around Olney for the beloved Olney Days celebration, the Mormon Temple in Silver Spring, the Olney Theatre Center, and of course, Montreux, Switzerland.

Not bad, eh? All of us in the Olney Big Band hope that you, our readers, are enjoying our 10th Anniversary year as much as we are.

Finally, a special word of thanks from me to Dr. Bob Tennyson, our Music Director, who took over directing rehearsals and concerts in September, 2011, during two medical emergencies that took me out of action until about now. Under Bob's tutelage, the musical quality of this big band has increased dramatically.

Thank you Bob, and thank you OBB musicians and vocalists!



Welcome to Austria!

When the Prutz Town Band (*Musikkapelle Prutz*) plays, it is playing the history of European band music. And as you listen to the clarion calls of the trumpets, rich harmonies of the wind instruments, and smartly percussive rhythms, the lush woods and majestic Alpine mountains of Austria come to mind.

The terrific *Musikkapelle Prutz* from western Austria is coming to Olney, for a single performance, on July 14. The group has won numerous awards, and the group's conductor, Dr. Rudi Pascher, as well as some of the band members are former students of Dr. Bob Tennyson, Music Director of the Olney Big Band. Tennyson, who lived in Austria between 1994 and 2010, often coached and guest-conducted the group.

The band, which will tour with some 55 musicians, plays formal concerts, concerts for the church, and during summers, a concert every two weeks for tourists, in a unique outdoor pavilion built for them by the town.

During the band's visit to America, *Musikkapelle Prutz* will perform twice. Their repertoire is based on traditional Austrian band music as well as internationally known pieces. They play in their indigenous attire, wearing lederhosen and dirndls.

Wind band ensembles have

their origin in 15th century Austria and Germany. Often connected to military units, these early ensembles spread to many countries and grew from small groups of oboes and bassoons into large bands of woodwinds, brass, and percussion, and eventually into today's concert bands and wind orchestras.

The program for the Olney concert includes von Suppe's exciting *Light Cavalry Overture*, Johann Strauss, Jr.'s beautiful *Roses from the South* waltz, and the rousing *Radetzky March* by Johann Strauss, Sr. There will also be some surprises!

The Prutz Town Band can be found at <http://www.musikkapelle-prutz.at>. And you can "like"

their Facebook page at <http://de-de.facebook.com/Musikkapelleprutz>.

We'll see you at the concert!

Details

- Saturday, July 14, Olney Theatre Center, 2001 Olney-Sandy Spring Road, Olney MD 20832, 3pm
- Sunday, July 15, "Oktoberfest in July," Indian Head Village Green, Indian Head, MD

Tickets for the Olney performance cost \$15. They can be purchased through the Olney Theatre Center's box office (301-924-4485) or online from <https://secure.ticketsage.net/websales.aspx?u=olney>. □



Our Talented Friend, Ben Grisafi Band Leader and Arranger

by DR. RIPRICE

Perhaps you were present at the historic event that took place in August 2007: the Olney Big Band was certified by the Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame as the very first “Ambassadors of Big Band Music.” This means that we had met their requirement to “perpetuate, promote, and perform with integrity” the sounds of the big band era.

The presentation was made by Ben Grisafi, now 82, who has had a 67-year professional career as a band leader, arranger, and saxophone player.

Although he is currently dealing with end-stage prostate cancer, he just recently played some gigs in the West Palm Beach (Florida) area, where he lives.

Grisafi’s professional career started at age 15 when he played in bands in New York.

Grisafi’s professional career started at age 15 when he played in bands in New York. He was drafted into the Army in 1951 and was assigned to the Dixie Division Army Band. In 1993, Grisafi co-organized a reunion for his military bandsmen and put together a big band for the occasion. It was such a success that Grisafi started the Ben Grisafi Big Band.

Having his own band gave Grisafi a chance to create musical arrangements. He also self-



Ben Grisafi presents the Olney Big Band with the first ever Ambassadors of Big Band Music Award, August 2007

produced and recorded five CDs of the band’s music, all containing charts (some of which were original compositions) arranged by Ben.

After being diagnosed with cancer in 2001, Grisafi moved to Florida in 2003 for the easier lifestyle. Within a year, he had formed yet another big band.

His cancer remained in check until he began needing chemotherapy in 2010. “My sidemen tell me I’m an inspiration to them to hear me play in my condition with such a high level of energy,” said Ben. “Music is my salvation.”

Ben’s current band is called the Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame Orchestra, because the late Paul Bennett designated him as co-custodian of a fund to perpetuate the “Sally Bennett Big Band Hall of Fame” name. The highlight of his career came in 1994, when he opened for singer Jerry Vale at Carnegie Hall, with Ben’s now classic

arrangement of *My Buddy*. The OBB has this arrangement and it keeps the memory of the band’s dear departed friends close to us.

Ben’s advice for anyone with cancer is “to continue something that they have enjoyed doing in their healthy years. With certain adjustments, anything is possible.”

Another Ben Grisafi arrangement in the OBB’s repertory is the very aptly titled *There Will Never Be Another You*. We play this chart very frequently.

See more photos of Ben, the band, and the award presentation on that special August night in this archived issue of *In the Mood*:

http://www.olneybigband.org/newsletter_pdfs/SpecialEdition_eFile.pdf

ITM thanks the Neighborhood Post of Palm Beach, FL for permission to reprint excerpts of Randall P. Lieberman’s article.



An Experience to Remember

by BRAD BAWEK

America's Got Talent (AGT) is a variety show that airs on NBC during the spring and summer season. It's like the old Ted Mack Original Amateur Hour television show, only on steroids.

Last November (2011), AGT held auditions in Washington, D.C. Times being what they are, even the remotest possibility of winning \$1 million is enough to rent a tuxedo and spend 3.5 hours standing out in the cold for a 90-second chance to make it past the first round. I went down to the Walter Williams Convention Center, along with my highly qualified support team: my wife Alison, our sons Shane and Dean, and Dean's girlfriend Nixie.

When we got to the convention center..., the line was already two blocks long

When we got to the convention center a few minutes after 8am, the line was already two blocks long. AGT staff handed out armbands to differentiate the performers from the supporters, and performers also received "official AGT Tags" so that we wouldn't lose our place in line. I was handed #468.

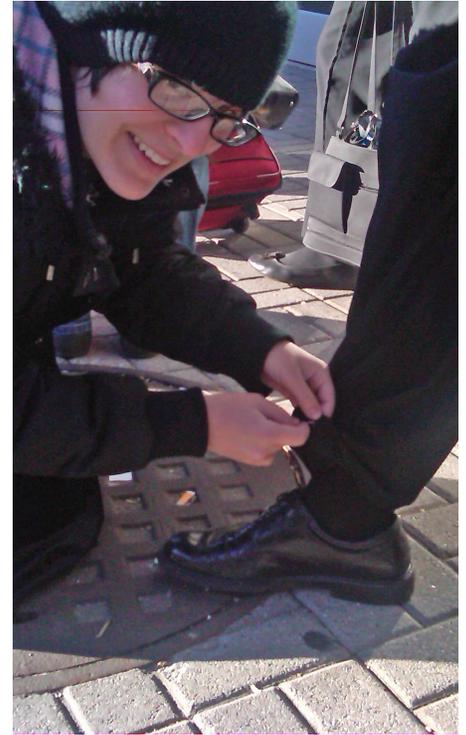
Around 8:30, the AGT staff pulled the line forward so they could take a group photo and shoot some video of the crowd. By the time we got to L Street, which dissects the convention center and was blocked off by DC police, the shoot area was packed with about 800 people. The producer setting up the shot asked our group to move up to fill in the front line, so I strategically placed us in the center of the shot so we'd have a better chance of showing up

on film. But of course, right before they began the shot, the producers dragged out a large group of costumed dancers to top off the front line; so much for front row center. However, if they show the DC auditions group shot on TV, we'll be three rows back dead center -- look for the only guy wearing a tux, and you'll find us.

About the tux: the AGT information sheet encouraged the performers to "dress to impress." As far I could tell, most performers looked like they had just rolled out of bed. Boy, did I stick out! At least it helped me create the classy image I was trying to portray for my performance.

We were then asked to get back in line according to our assigned numbers. Dean and Nixie joined us in line around 9:30, and thankfully Nixie had a needle and thread with her. The hem at the bottom right pant leg of my rental tux had fallen right before we boarded the Metro, and I had been walking around all morning with my right hand in my pocket holding up my pants. The separation had actually worsened during our first video shoot, when a young woman walking behind me stepped on my heel, nearly tearing off my shoe and removing what little hem threading was left. While Nixie was kneeling on the sidewalk hemming up my pants, I turned to the curious onlookers and calmly explained that "I never travel anywhere without my tailor." The people around us weren't quite sure how to take me, but my support team got a good laugh out of it.

We stood in line, freezing, until about 11:30, when our group of about 25 performers and supporters were finally let into the building. We were funneled past a security check point and into a holding area between two velvet rope barriers. It took us about



My personal tailor (photo by Alison Bawek)

20 minutes to get checked in, and then we were sent to a huge holding room to wait for our numbers to be called.

The audition holding room was packed. Occasionally a producer and camera crew would come through and pick someone out of the crowd to interview; from what I could tell, they chose the more "unique" acts. The AGT staff also staged a little entertainment in an attempt to keep anxiety levels down. Now and then, assistant producers would come in and call out numbers belonging to performers, who were then ferried off to the audition rooms. Between all of these activities, an eerie quiet would hang over the room, then the performers would slowly go back to warming up their acts.

As time in the audition holding room wore on, I became aware of a young man who was playing his

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guitar and singing. He couldn't have sung any flatter if he had been doing so as part of his act, and he firmly believed that the louder he sang, the better chance he had of hitting those high notes. Sadly, that theory was wrong, and his increased volume only resulted in the notes going even flatter. I got up repeatedly to move; this fellow was seriously interfering with my pregame ritual, which consisted of walking around, humming my 90-second audition medley to myself, drinking water, and tapping a picture of my brother Randy. My brother passed away in 2006, and having spent many years sharing music together, I dedicated my audition to him and had placed his photo in my breast pocket for good luck.

It was a circus side-show walking dream scene from some long-lost *Twilight Zone* episode

Finally, at 2pm, performer numbers #450 through #500 were called. I got up, took a deep breath, kissed Alison, hugged the kids, tapped the picture of Randy again, and headed into the hall to join the rest of the dreamers. An assistant producer asked all the singers (all 49) to line up on the left, and all the dancers (all 1) to stand on the right. Being led like a trail of ducklings through the dark depths of the convention center was nerve-wracking, thrilling, and every other adjective you can think of. When we finally surfaced into a main corridor, we passed other performers who were waiting to enter the audition rooms -- a belly dancing troupe, a magician, a drag queen, a wacky magician with an assistant dressed up in a turtle costume. It was a

circus side-show walking dream scene from some long-lost *Twilight Zone* episode.

We finally reached the three rooms that were reserved for singers; I was in the last audition room with a group of about 20 people: 14 performers and 6 parent guardians for the under-18 singers. The assistant producer who was managing the auditions welcomed us and tried his best to make everyone relax. I sidled up close to him so I could hear what he had to say, as well as banter with him to calm myself down. I gave him a big smile and engaged him warmly as I handed him my paperwork. He responded by telling me that I looked dapper in my tux, and I thanked him and told him that Dapper used to be my stage name. He got a kick out of that and said that his stage name could be Debonair. I said that was perfect and we could take our show out on the road together as "The Dapper and Debonair Show"; with a wink I told him we could work later on who got top billing. It was just silly patter, but it served its purpose of not only calming me down, but everyone else who was within earshot.

The assistant producer collected our paperwork and told us we could sit down and that there was also time to visit the restrooms to warm up our voices. As I got up to take advantage of that offer, one of the young women from our group began warming up -- folks, I am here to tell you she was phenomenal, I mean Aretha Franklin wrapped around Beyonce. I returned to the audition room where an entirely new dynamic was taking place: the diva was now seated amongst her competitors and basking in the glow of their fawning adulation. It wasn't until later that I realized she had done that on purpose to psych everyone out, a tactic that unfolded perfectly for her as the audition commenced.

The assistant producer came out and motioned us into the dimly

lit audition room, which had a 12-foot-high ceiling and a long working table at the back. At the table sat the producer with our paperwork, a mountain of notepads, a laptop, and a small digital video camera pointed toward a large blue-taped X in the middle of the room.

The producer explained that he would call us to perform in no particular order, that he wanted us to come forward when our name was called, then state our name, age, and what we were going to sing. The first one up was an 11-year-old girl with the voice of an angel; unfortunately, she sang so softly that it was difficult to hear her. One by one, the youngest of the contestants auditioned, and did very well, but the diva was especially good, as professional and polished as she was during her pregame smackdown.

I had been standing quietly along the left wall waiting for my name to be called. When the producer called me out, I stepped forward, held up my folder, and said that there must be some mistake, and that I was here with the menu (my folder) so the producer could order lunch. Before he could respond I said I was sorry, but I had been dragging that rental tux around all day and had to get something out of the effort. This got a chuckle and served to calm everyone down (including me).

I stated my name and declared that I would be 56 tomorrow. Surprisingly, everyone gave me a round of applause and before they could finish I playfully admonished them by explaining that it wasn't right to applaud people just for getting old. I then announced that I would be performing a medley that included *It Had To Be You* by Harry Connick, Jr. and *My*

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Funny Valentine by Frank Sinatra.

I stood still, took a deep breath, and started singing my heart out. I told Alison later that it was almost an out-of-body experience and I watched myself singing each phrase like I was gently wrapping a present complete with a beautiful bow to be handed to my beloved. When I finished the first medley segment, I caught a glimpse of the producer sitting completely still with his head turned slightly and the most curious grin on his face, a weird blend of “this is good,” and “what’ya know, this is good.” Well, that was all the encouragement I needed and I slipped into *Valentine* like it was the last song I would ever sing in my life. When I finished you could have heard a pin drop. Then, the room erupted in applause and the contestant who had been standing next to me against the wall exclaimed “Man, you are really good.”

“so, if we don’t hear from you by Groundhog’s Day, there will be six more weeks of winter for us?”

When we completed our auditions, the producer thanked us and said we would be contacted by the end of January if we were moving on. As everyone filed out, I walked over to the producer and said that I just wanted to verify they would contact us by the end of January if we moved on. He politely said yes, with a weary nod of his head. I responded “so, if we don’t hear from you by Groundhog’s Day, there will be six more weeks of winter for us?” He got a chuckle out of that one, too.

Once the audition room door closed behind us, the assistant

producer thanked us all for participating then paused a moment with his hand against his headset, and stated that there was some issue with the paperwork for “the diva” and Bradley. Well, I was close enough to hear him and jokingly commented that I couldn’t have a problem with my paperwork because I had organized it in my lucky red “recycle” folder. He laughed and called the diva’s name again. Of course, she hadn’t heard him because she was in the corner again singing for her new set of groupies.

While waiting to go back in, I noticed I had lost my special AGT number tag that I had paper clipped to my rental tux. So, when it was my turn to go back in I went straight to where I had been standing, picked my tag up off the floor and said that I would only be a minute because I had lost my tag and my mom would probably want me to save it. The producer laughed and said he wanted to talk with me -- I responded that I hoped it wasn’t about that menu thing, and I really could get him something to eat if he wanted. He chuckled again and asked me if I minded standing back on the blue X and let him film a little more. Of course I said yes! He started by saying “you have a beautiful voice,” and then asked “Who are you, I mean where do you sing, when did you start, tell me something about yourself?” So, I gave my mini-me tour from singing Christmas carols as a kid to spreading the word about the great American Songbook with the Olney Big Band.

He asked if I would like to sing another song, and I said “sure, how much do you want,” to which he replied, “whatever you’d like.” Since I had just finished talking about the great American Songbook and all the writers and performers who make up the rich tapestry, blah, blah, blah, I couldn’t help but add a tip-in about the song I was going to sing.

I begged his indulgence and told him about the writers of the song I was going to perform (Jay Livingston and Ray Evans). How they were a great team that had not only written Academy Award winners *Mona Lisa*, and *Que Sera Sera*, but had also written a couple of the greatest TV theme songs of all time, *Bonanza* and *Mr. Ed*. His response was, wow, those really ARE great theme songs. (This chat of mine allowed me calm down again; the nerves had started to kick back in. I had thought that performing for the producer with other contestants around would be difficult, but the one-on-one audition was frightful.)

I then sang *Mona Lisa* by Nat King Cole. I nailed every note, but I don’t think I had the passion that was present during the initial audition. I was pretty baked by then, and the tank was starting to get low.

When I finished up, he thanked me for my time; I thanked him for his time, and topped it off by telling him that I had seen the end of the line outside before I had come back in, so there was officially light at the end of tunnel. He chuckled again and I made good my escape. Mission accomplished: I had sung my Aunt Fanny off, and left ‘em with a smile.

Finally, let me say that the *America’s Got Talent* audition experience was something I wouldn’t trade for the world. The whole AGT staff was polite, efficient, and encouraging throughout the entire process. It was a heck of a ride that I was able to share with my family. Plus, how often do you get to spend a brisk November Saturday with thousands of your closest friends? □

This Date in OBB History

Where Were You When?

by DR. SUE VAZAKAS

May 2006

The Cedarbrook Community Church in Clarksburg, MD had decided to have a dance to raise funds for their missionary work overseas. The large glass-enclosed space had a generous stage for the band and a lot of room for the approximately 150 dancers, who were mostly young folks. OBB director Rip Rice commented that this kind of audience took him back to Saturday dances when he was a teenager, but with a difference: “We didn’t have an hour of swing dance instruction before the dance; we KNEW swing dancing!”

April 2008

The Olney Big Band went big-time at the famous Blues Alley in Georgetown! The event was titled “Battle of the Big Bands,” because the Mt. Vernon Swing Band played that evening as well, all part of the Smithsonian’s “Jazz Appreciation Month” activities.

June 2008

The Music Center at Strathmore invited the band to perform on a summer evening for its “Free Summer Concert Series.” It was perfect -- 150 happy picnicking people on the beautiful green lawn, looking forward to hearing some fine swing music. Perfect, that is, except for the thunder, lightning, and rain that cancelled our gig and made the band and all those picnickers have to go home!

April 2009

The family and friends of our beloved band member Judge Bob Redding celebrated his 90th birthday at the Studio of Ballet Arts in Sandy Spring. After lunch, the Olney Big Band played a set filled with songs that celebrated Bob. Bob himself, of course, played heartily from his usual spot in the trumpet section.

May 2010

It was a great privilege to play at the “Barry Bash,” in honor of one of Olney’s most beloved citizens, Barry Schwartz. Barry and the staff from his well-known restaurant, B.J. Pumpnickel’s, gave the band its first regular public concert series at the “Second Sunday” brunches held at the Sandy Spring Firehouse Ballroom from 2004 through 2007. The Bash was held at the Olney Theatre Center, which was absolutely packed.

June 2010

The Brooke Grove Retirement Community in Sandy Spring celebrated its 60th anniversary in fine style – a day of activities and performances by musical groups,

topped off by an evening concert by the Olney Big Band, out on the beautiful lawn.

June 2012

One weekend found the band playing two wildly different gigs in two different counties. The Saturday night was a three-hour dance at the Hollywood Ballroom Dance Center in Silver Spring, MD. The Ballroom is now under new management, and the publicity as well as the new menu brought in a big crowd. The floor was packed during every waltz, polka, samba, and cha-cha. The band looked very professional in black pants, white shirts, and their new black-and-white musical-note ties.

In contrast, the Sunday’s gentle summer evening was glorious for the crowd sitting by the lakefront in Columbia, MD and listening to the band while enjoying their picnics. Families, lawn chairs, and coolers filled the lawn, while some folks even danced out front, including a few who had heard us the night before in Silver Spring at the Ballroom! □



The OBB at Columbia, MD (Photo by Deb Fitzer)

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
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David B. Schumer, Band Manager/Treasurer
Liz Schwendenmann, Recording Secretary
Halsey Smith
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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 McMahan, 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, July 14 - The Prutz Town Austrian Concert Band, Olney Theatre Center, Olney, MD, 3:00pm - 4:30pm. Open to the Public.

Saturday, August 18 - Caroline Summerfest 2012, Denton, MD, 7:30pm - 9:30pm. Open to the Public.

Friday, August 31 - End of Summer Concert, Riderwood, Silver Spring, MD, 7:30pm - 9:00pm. Closed to the Public.

Saturday, September 15 - Swing!Swing!Swing! IV. Olney Theatre Center, Olney MD, 1:30pm - 4:00pm. Open to the Public.

Saturday, October 20 - Capital Cotillion Ballroom Dance Group 50th Anniversary Party, Sheraton Premiere at Tysons Corner. Closed to the public.

Don't forget to visit us on Facebook

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

“Imagine what a harmonious world it could be if every single person, both young and old shared a little of what he is good at doing.”

- Quincy Jones

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